

Humanities academics' perceptions of graduate employability

By Sabrina Altariva

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A dissertation written by

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ABSTRACT

In 2012 we witnessed a sharp increase in tuition fees; UK students can now expect to pay a substantial amount of money for their undergraduate degree. The pace of change and technological advancements within the current UK labour market is rapid, and the impacts are exponential, with it now being referred to as the 'fourth industrial revolution' (Hancock, 2017). How does a humanities degree "hold-up" in today's economic climate?

This small-scale qualitative study gives insight into humanities academics' (HAs) perceptions, experiences, values and understandings, as well as their expectations relating to the graduate employability of humanities students. The research utilised semi-structured in-depth interviews with lecturers who teach humanities undergraduate degree programmes at a post-92 English university.

The findings revealed a number of key issues which suggest potential for employability initiatives which could be explored further, including cross-faculty partnerships, tapping into the personal tutor- student relationships and the benefits of work-based learning modules for humanities students. They also reveal a shift in perceptions of how and when students engage with employability, as well as a perceived increase in student angst around the increased tuition fees, and how students will inevitably repay them. The findings also indicate that more work could be undertaken to build up students' self-awareness of their skills developed during their degrees, and how these skills may translate when entering the graduate labour market.

Although the research findings are based on a small sample, the study finds that there are potential implications for how careers services might support compulsory placement modules for humanities students and what the impact of undertaking the placement may be. They also explore how careers services could further support humanities students to become more adaptable and enterprising, and to help them with their career decision making skills at an earlier stage. There may be increased benefits to exploring compulsory placement modules in greater depth, and conducting further research into how other careers services work with personal tutor programmes to provide a more holistic approach to supporting students during their degree. The study also concludes that further research needs to be taken regarding cross-faculty partnerships in order to help students on non-vocational degree programmes gain more vocational skills prior to considering post-graduate qualifications.

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- falsifying data by presenting data of laboratory reports, projects or other assessments as one's own when these data are based on experimental work conducted by another party or obtained by unfair means;
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- the summarising of another person's material by changing a few words or altering the order of presentation without reference or acknowledgement;
- the substantial and unauthorised use of the ideas of another person without acknowledgement;
- copying the work of another student with or without the student's knowledge or agreement;
- deliberate use of commissioned material which is presented as one's own;
- the unacknowledged quotation of phrases from another's work.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

The digitalisation of industry is revolutionising the workplace at an immense speed, and with it brings 'disruption'. (Hancock, 2017) It has also led to increased noise in the media around the contested value of humanities degrees and how more young people should be taking up STEM subjects to fill skills gaps and to ensure students have a bright and successful future (Garner, 2014). UK tuition fees almost trebled in 2012, making students question what value they are getting for their money. How do humanities subjects now fit into the 'fourth industrial revolution'? (Hancock, 2017) Do they still have a place? Is it still worth students undertaking these non-vocational subjects at an undergraduate level? There is plenty of data available on recruitment figures for humanities undergraduate courses, and graduate destinations for humanities students. But what skills does a humanities degree equip you with? What employability provision is provided to humanities students to give them the best possible chance at succeeding, and what do HAs think the best employability approach is for their students? HAs spend a lot of time in front of their students throughout the academic year, they can be extremely influential over curriculum content and what students decide to engage with throughout their degree. HAs can provide an invaluable, thorough and rare insight into this topic and their perspectives are under-researched.

Research aims & objectives

The aim of my dissertation is to inform practice with regard to student employability in the humanities by exploring the perspectives and understandings of HAs.

The research will focus on exploring HAs perspectives on student motivations, what a humanities degree equips students with, graduate employability and HAs preferred approaches to employability.

Research Objectives:

- To identify HAs understanding of student motivations to study their degree subjects
- To examine HAs perspectives of current employability strategy at their post-92 English university
- To identify HAs beliefs on what their degree programmes equip students with upon graduation

- To evaluate HAs knowledge and understanding of relevant graduate opportunities and the graduate labour market
- To identify HAs perspectives on student awareness of graduate opportunities

Report outline

The study begins with a literature review in Chapter 2, identifying the current state of play for humanities graduates in the UK, from the perspective of graduates themselves. The literature also captures an insight from employers, government statistics and other relevant stakeholders to provide a holistic overview of the existing climate. The review also identifies how career theory relates to humanities graduates.

Following this, Chapter 3 explores the methodology and rationale for undertaking qualitative research through the platform of qualitative research interviews, and further discusses my approach and justification behind the sampling process and how the data was analysed.

Chapter 4 outlines the core findings against key themes which arose during the in-depth interviews, succeeding a thematic analysis of the data. This is followed by a thorough discussion about the significance of these findings in relation to the literature review and my interpretation of the findings.

Finally, Chapter 5 summarises the impact of the findings, the implications for future practice and further research, as well as the limitations of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review has been undertaken to explore the current state of play for humanities undergraduate students and graduates in England and Wales, in relation to their employability. The review explores the perspectives of a variety of stakeholders including employers, students, academics as well as government legislation. The literature review incorporates research surrounding the humanities curriculum within higher education, and its relationship with skills acquisition and graduate employability. In recent years, the former secretary of state was an advocate for encouraging young people to avoid choosing subjects in humanities and the arts. But rather, the subjects to keep your options open and “unlock the doors to all sorts of careers are the STEM subjects”. (Garner, 2014). This was potentially harmful to the take-up in humanities subjects and was seen by some as discrediting the value that humanities skills can bring to the economy. Figures earlier this year demonstrated that there has been a decline in the uptake of humanities subjects at A-level, compared to STEM subjects’ figures. “English is hugely valuable in all sorts of jobs. The trend is really worrying”, according to Eleanor Busby, the current Education Correspondent for The Independent (Busby, 2018).

Part 1. Search parameters

1.1 Searches

The following searches were included as part of the review:

i. Journal Databases-

Elsevier Journals <https://www.elsevier.com/about/open-science/open-access/open-access-journals>

Jstor <https://www.jstor.org/>

Suncat <https://suncat.ac.uk/search>

Nicec <http://www.nicec.org/current-research>

SAGE Journals <http://journals.sagepub.com/>

ii. Library Catalogues-

Google Scholar <https://scholar.google.com/intl/en/scholar/about.html>

British Library <https://www.bl.uk/>

WorldCat <https://www.worldcat.org/>

COPAC <https://copac.jisc.ac.uk/>

Taylor and Francis online <https://www.tandfonline.com/>

iii. Professional websites-

HEA Academy Knowledge Hub <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/hub>

Warwick Institute for Employment Research <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/>

Prospects Luminare <https://luminare.prospects.ac.uk/>

HESA <https://www.hesa.ac.uk>

Wonkhe <https://wonkhe.com/>

Department for Education <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education>

Arts Council England www.artscouncil.org.uk

Royal History Society <https://royalhistsoc.org/>

iv. Newspaper databases

The Independent <https://www.independent.co.uk/>

The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/uk>

1.2 Search process

Within my searches, I used the following search terms across all resources

Humanities	Education	Careers	Work experience	Stakeholders
Arts	University	Employability	Jobs	Undergraduates
Languages	Higher Education	Guidance	Placements	Graduates
History	Further Study	Careers Education	Work based learning	Students
English	Postgraduate study	Employment	Graduate schemes	Employers
Philosophy	Curriculum	Advice	Graduate programmes	Placement providers
Classics	Module	Careers Development	Volunteering	Recruiters
Culture	Study	Skills	Internship	Academics
Heritage	Course		Labour market	Lecturers
				Tutors

1.3 Article inclusion

I reviewed a wide range of articles which were directly related to the research aims. My literature was a range of UK based literature with some international literature included on the themes of careers guidance. Most of the literature included is within the past 10 years. Some literature pre-dates this; however it is relevant to the topic and the theories which underpin my research.

Part 2. Current state of play for humanities graduates

2.1 Employability skills

There are a wide range of sources which discuss the skills a humanities graduate will acquire during their degree. One of the main sources is the course information of the humanities degrees on university websites, which now typically include a career path or employability overview, depicting the skills gained. Many UK universities identify that their English Literature undergraduate programmes will help students to develop skills such as the development of “time management and organisation, oral and written communication, team work, analytical thinking, information gathering and interpersonal skills. This is good news for humanities graduates as we know many graduate opportunities are open to all graduates, and the acquisition of such transferable skills allows these graduates to move into different sectors. However, could it be argued that most undergraduate programmes across all sectors will support graduates to develop these soft transferable skills? In 2015 the HEA funded a project at the University of Huddersfield to explore ‘Employability in the Humanities Curriculum’. The skills that the humanities students felt they had acquired were “specific Humanities competencies in imagination, emotional intelligence, cultural sensitivity, and the ability to analyse large, disparate and complex sets of information” (HEA, 2015 p.4). Part of this project also involved employer feedback once humanities students had completed a placement with the provider. Humanities students’ skills and qualities, identified by the placement providers, were time management, communication, professionalism, enthusiasm and imagination. Communication was a skill that the students were less able to identify in themselves in this project, which highlights that not all students are aware of the skills they possess and express.

So how can our humanities graduates stand out in a competitive and rapidly evolving UK graduate labour market which contains around 14 million graduates, as of a recent ONS report? (ONS, 2017, p.2) The Right Skills report (The Right Skills, 2017) argues that humanities graduates “bring an understanding of the human consequences of developments

such as artificial intelligence, which can be used to shape the legal, moral and ethical frameworks which need to be created as part of the new digital age.” (p.12). This report also outlines the specialist skills humanities attain such as “empathy, sociability and ethical awareness”, skills which “cannot be replicated by technology” (p.12). The humanities article in last year’s *What do graduates do?* publication (Guy, 2018) also highlights these acquired skills about what it means to be human, about the exploration of ourselves and our world, through literature and stories, through understanding “historical periods, demographics and cultures, involves practice in empathy” (Guy, 2018, p.32). It can also be argued that through the pure nature of studying humanities, students are choosing to enter non-vocational education, and therefore need to be able to cope with uncertainty about where the degree might lead, and further ability to be adaptable for a wide range of careers and industries. It is evident from the literature that humanities disciplines can develop specialist skills which can hold a place as we progress through the ‘fourth industrial revolution’. It can foster skills which may not be developed through rival STEM subjects and therefore it can be argued that there is still a place in society for the humanities.

2.2 Post-graduate study

One of the main motivations for pursuing a humanities degree, is arguably the love of the subject matter. As there are few graduate careers which allow you to continue directly reading your subject within the role, it seems apparent that these disciplines lend themselves well to continue with further study as a humanities graduate destination. One of the few direct vocations to come out of a humanities degree, has traditionally been a career in teaching. Pursuing a career in mainstream teaching requires further study of a post-graduate level degree as one of the mainstream entry routes. The results of the recent ‘Destinations of Leavers in Higher Education’ report (DLHE) (HESA, 2018) illustrates that around one quarter of historical and philosophical studies students, were in further study six months after graduation. Language graduates displayed a similar number, with 23%, which sits higher than the average across all disciplines, of 15%. “The newly-introduced postgraduate loans have undoubtedly increased numbers into further study, but the humanities, and in particular History, have long demonstrated an increased likelihood in academic progression.” (Guy, 2018) However, English graduates continuing with further study were slightly less than the national average. Moreover, of the English graduates who did pursue further study, over one quarter of these graduates were pursuing a postgraduate qualification in education. Languages demonstrated a similar statistic; however, History was lower with 14.9% of graduates enrolling on a PGCE course in the UK.

However, there has reportedly been a decrease in post-graduate teaching applications for various subjects including English and History in 2018. A recent TES article (Ward, 2018) reports that History has seen a 31% drop in applications over the past 12 months in the UK, according to UCAS statistics. There has also been continued negative press about the nature of the teaching profession, following the department for education's research into the number of teachers leaving the profession (around 40,000 in 2016). Some articles portray the profession negatively (Tapper, 2018) highlighting that many teachers have "left the profession, retired early, had a breakdown, or been signed off work with stress", which can have a harmful effect on the numbers entering the profession. The drop in the number of applicants could also be an impact following the introduction of postgraduate loans in 2015, allowing graduates more study choice of subject disciplines, without having to pay any upfront fees. For UK graduates to qualify for the Master's student finance loan, they are required to study a full master's level qualification, as opposed to a postgraduate certificate or diploma. This is reflected in the DLHE report for last year's graduates which illustrates that across all humanities subjects, between 53% and 64% of those who went on to further study, enrolled on a full master's level qualification. This could also be the result of the continued improvement and embedding of careers and employability education in undergraduate degrees.

Other areas of further study according to the recent DLHE report (HESA, 2018) include law, journalism, heritage and museum, marketing, security, medieval and Victorian studies, global studies. Seeing humanities graduates pursuing a broad range of subject areas is very refreshing, as they are making decisions which are shaping their career, they are assessing their skillset and transferring them to new disciplines, they are not restricting themselves solely to their subject area.

2.3 Employment destinations

According to the recent Highfliers report (Highfliers, 2018) the average graduate starting salary in the UK across leading employers is £30,000. However, salaries will vary depending on which region you are working in. Also, this report focuses on large UK employers. Small to medium enterprises make-up 99% of all businesses in the UK (Rhodes, 2017).

The 2016/17 DLHE survey illustrated that the humanities graduate starting salaries, of those in professional employment six months after graduate, was between £19,787 for English and £22,773 for Philosophy graduates. The same survey reports a UK average graduate earning of £22,855 across all subject areas. Humanities on average are not top UK earners, however sit well with the UK average and can stand up tall with other social science disciplines for example. The top earners were science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) related

subjects. Previous Longitudinal studies (LEO) suggests that humanities graduate earnings do increase over time, taking into account further study and progression as well as inflation. However, the data suggests that STEM graduate earnings accelerate more quickly and to a higher value on average, than humanities graduates. Humanities graduates are also less likely to find themselves in highly skilled employment (Kernohan, 2018).

It is important to note here, that scholars have considered the various motivations for students studying a humanities degree, with some arguing that they are less concerned about financial gains and “are more likely to want ‘altruistic rewards’” (Nicholls, 2005 p.6). The new Graduate Outcomes Survey which replaces the traditional DLHE survey, will include some of these ‘meaningfulness’ (HESA, 2018) questions and may help to ascertain whether humanities graduates continue to demonstrate these motivations and acquire the personal fulfilment they may be seeking.

Humanities graduates are entering professions across many different sectors. The public sector is a popular destination and is one of the largest graduate recruiters, with over 4000 graduate vacancies in 2018. Highfliers (Highfliers, 2018) have predicted the biggest growth in UK employment vacancies to be within the public sector, amongst others.

The 2015 ‘Employability in the Humanities Curriculum’ report (Lugea et al., 2015) discussed alumni case studies, with graduate destinations including higher education and teaching, marketing and archives. The DLHE survey illustrates that the largest professional employment figures for humanities graduates falls into Marketing and PR roles, and Business, HR and Finance roles (HECSU, 2018) Retail and catering employment figures six months after graduation demonstrate similar figures, however we must bear in mind that many students continue with their part-time employment which they took up during their studies. This could be to build up funds and experience whilst waiting to start a professional course, whilst trying to decide which path to take or whilst volunteering alongside to build up relevant work experience.

Unemployment figures for humanities graduates are marginally higher than other subject areas at 5.5%- 6.5%. (HECSU, 2018) Although this is a disappointing figure, it is important to consider that a percentage of humanities graduates are retirees who have completed a degree for personal fulfilment as opposed to moving towards a career goal.

David Nichols conducted a review into the employability of UK History graduates both in 2005 and 2011. His research highlights that there are many successful and famous public figures that hold a history degree. These include political figures, famous journalists, celebrity comedians, directors of national charities and think tanks, as well as university vice

chancellors, and an increasing number of successful figures in the business and finance sector (Nicholls, 2011). Humanities degrees can lead to a successful career, as well as fame and status. However, many of the above figures may have had to complete additional study and several careers before they achieved their successes.

Research also suggests that humanities graduates also acquire the skills to become successful entrepreneurs. A university study surveyed 29 humanities graduates who had a successful entrepreneurial career (Croucher et al., 2007). The research discussed skills which the graduates believed they had gained from their degree, including lateral thinking, adaptability, creativity, negotiation contentions and cultural awareness amongst others (Croucher et al, 2007). This reaffirms some of the acquired skills discussed earlier. This piece of research also outlined some of the barriers these humanities graduates faced as a result of their degree discipline, with several citing that they felt “pigeon-holed by others’ perceptions of the degree” (Croucher et al., 2007, p.18) and other graduates citing that they had to “justify my choice of degree to people who would say ‘what’s the point’ and ‘what can you do with that’”(Croucher et al., 2007, p.19). It seems apparent that humanities disciplines can foster humanistic and specialised skills, however is enough being done to market and celebrate those skills? This same group of humanities graduates also identified a shared desire for more careers advice at an earlier stage in their degree, not only focusing on traditional careers but alternative careers, encouraging more lateral thinking (Croucher et al, 2007). Finally, these graduates also repeatedly identified the desire for more commercial awareness, business exposure, industry knowledge and more cross-faculty working with the business school for example, the limitations to this particular in-depth study is that it is now over 10 years old. This would be a suggested piece of research to follow-up given that the importance and value of enterprise education for all young people has been recently advocated (Young, 2014). University careers services have also evolved into extended careers services with changes to roles and advancements with placements, brokerage and consultancy, as well as more direct input into curriculum design (Watts and Butcher, 2008). The Royal History Society also advocates “employment prospects for graduate historians make plain that although historians are unlikely to command the very highest salaries available, significant numbers of them will do very well indeed, and few will face an uncertain future on account of their choice of degree, earning median salaries not dissimilar to those studying Mathematics and Computer Science. Recruitment at university also remains strong” (Burns, 2016, p.15).

Resources exist to try and provide graduates with career pathways to expand their horizons by presenting career options and previous graduates’ destinations. There are some sector-

wide resources such as prospects.ac.uk, targetjobs.co.uk and luminare.prospects.ac.uk. There are also resources to support specific subjects such as afterenglish.ac.uk, a website supported by the HEA to help English graduates discover their possibilities and to read case studies from other English graduates, a platform which could be extended for other humanities subjects.

2.4 Employability provision in Higher Education

Within higher education, the employability set-up varies across each institution.

A significant change in recent years, across the UK, is the embedment of enterprise and employability education within the curriculum (Butcher et al, 2011). Enterprise education in higher education has been developed following enterprise and entrepreneurship education guidance published by QAA which has been routinely developed over the past several years (QAA, 2018) A further paper (Young, 2014) argues that enterprise education is integral for all higher education students, and that “it is that quality that gives an individual a positive outlook, an ability to see the glass as half full rather than half empty, and is a valuable attribute for the whole of life” (Young, 2014, p.5).

The 2009 Future Fit report (Future Fit, 2009) highlights the growing demand from employers and students involving work related learning and placements. The review also discussed three core higher education approaches. The main approaches for non-vocational subjects like the humanities, appears to be employability skills embedded into the curricular, and extracurricular activities. The work-based learning and placements model tend to focus more on vocational subjects. Has this created a lack of opportunities and lack of work experience amongst humanities graduates?

Many higher education institutions will run careers and employability events throughout the academic year. Some of the more mainstream careers fairs appear to be teaching fairs and Law fairs amongst others. These can be advertised externally to the universities, on platforms such as Prospects.ac.uk, tes.com and lawcareers.net. It is less clear how much provision is specifically running and tailored for humanities students. Many events will be open to all students, but if they are labelled as ‘business fair’ or ‘law fair’, do humanities students know they can access these events? From my own experience within the sector, I think there is a need to be more communicative internally, across departments and faculties, to further encourage lateral thinking amongst students within different subject areas.

Many universities have adopted their own ways to measure employability and have created their own frameworks. Some institutions have made sector specific employability frameworks. UCLan created their own humanities employability framework (Ceth, 2009). This framework was categorised with employability attributes as a means of identifying,

developing, embedding and assessing employability, for lecturers, personal tutors and for students to help them action plan. Similarly, Hawkins and Woolf have created a Historians' Skills Matrix (Hawkins and Woolf, 2018) to bring together QAA skills and work-based learning skills as means to promote the value of undergraduate placement modules. It is unclear how many other institutions have adopted similar models, but perhaps this is something to research further and on a larger scale.

In 2017, there were over 540,000 UK and EU leavers who graduated from Higher education (HESA, 2017). On average, there were approximately 13,000 paid internship and placement roles advertised in the UK in 2018. Clearly there are not enough opportunities for every student to undertake paid experience such as this. Because of the nature of humanities subjects there are very few placements advertised in the UK which directly relate to humanities subjects. In order for humanities students to gain work experience, they may need to also look towards volunteering as a way to gain relevant work experience. This type of experience could sit well with their intrinsic values. However, this could also be problematic for students with employment and other responsibilities. This is a potential argument for embedding work-based learning into a humanities curriculum.

Many universities offer undergraduate students the placement year option during their studies. Some universities also offer four-year degrees, with the placement year already integrated within the course. The set-up, provision and resource for this will vary across each institution. We know that employer engagement and first-hand experience in the workplace is a top priority for the government's careers strategy to improve careers education across schools in England, as reflected in the Gatsby Benchmarks framework (DfE, 2018). From my own professional experience as a guidance professional, few humanities students successfully take up the placement year option. This could be because of a lack of support and promotion from the humanities lecturers. This could also be because the placement year is a paid placement. Are there enough paid placement opportunities which directly link to humanities subject areas? A recent report from Arts Council England discussed the severe cuts to arts and culture in England recently; "significant cuts are being made to museums, libraries and the arts" (Arts Council England, 2016, p.4) in certain local authorities. This will have an impact on the number of graduate opportunities in the sector, as well as paid opportunities for work experience. The number of opportunities within large private businesses and SME's will be of no comparison to anything that is ran by the public sector. We know there are opportunities to be part of schemes such as Civil Service Fast Stream and National Graduate Development Programme to name a few, however these are graduate level roles and arguably, elitist roles that favour applicants from private school

backgrounds (Walker, 2018). Do we need to do more to encourage our humanities undergraduates to think more laterally and apply for placement year roles within other sectors, managerial and leadership roles, administrative and analyst roles for example? The placement year is very competitive and humanities students will be competing with those whose degrees directly refer to the role they are applying for? At my current post-92 university employer, an optional volunteering module is run at level 6 across many humanities' subject areas. This is a good opportunity for those who have not managed to fulfil the placement year and instead these students can take-up a shorter unpaid 10-week placement. However, from my knowledge the take-up for this module is also quite low. The 'Employability in the Humanities Curriculum' report (Lugea et al., 2015) also discussed the student experiences of a similar work placement module, a voluntary experience. The report highlighted that the university wished to build on its links with placement providers to create more opportunities for humanities students to complete a placement year, something which is currently rare for non-vocational courses (Lugea et al., 2015). These students also stated that they found it difficult to acquire the placement, they left it quite late to find the placements and also felt that the careers service should have more timetabled placement support in place. It was also stated that students could have independently approached the careers service for this support but chose not to do so (Lugea et al., 2015). This could help inform placement provision in extended careers services across higher education, as the report suggests students would be more encouraged to seek support if the placement support was timetabled and therefore compulsory to attend. Humanities placement year opportunities is another area which I feel could be further researched.

Recent research into placement modules for UK history undergraduates discusses that some universities are making a history placement a compulsory element of the course (Hawkins and Woolf, 2018). They argue that compulsory placements would also make it fairer for all students to access the same opportunities and support, whatever their background or social status (Hawkins and Woolf, 2018).

Part 3. Career theory and its relation to humanities graduates

3.1 Motivations

Humanities subjects cover the study of human thought, the history and philosophy which underpins our existence and the human condition. Some argue that there are very few employment opportunities which allow you to continue studying your subject once in post. Motivations for taking up a humanities degree vary. If we consider the students who chose it for the love of the subject, and consider matching theories such as Holland (Holland, 1997),

this would underpin the argument for why students might take up a career in teaching thereafter, as teaching is arguably one of the few careers which allows you to continue reading your subject within the role. Humanities disciplines have traditionally attracted mature learners and retirees. If we consider Super's lifespan model (Super, 1990), some of these students are in the 'decline' stage. Therefore, the aforementioned students may be taking up the humanities degree for personal fulfilment and wellbeing rather than graduate employment prospects.

It is argued that those who choose to study humanities are more concerned with intrinsic outputs rather than external factors such as monetary rewards (Nicholls, 2005). Many of the enterprising humanities graduates explored in the literature review reaffirmed that they were "not primarily motivated by money" (Croucher et al., 2007, p.23). If we link this to the values of this type of humanities student, Holland's career choice theory (Holland, 1997) would suggest that these graduates would go on to become professionals relating to the 'Social' category, such as teaching and counselling (Holland, 1997). Let's also consider the humanities student that is pursuing a humanities degree because they have not yet decided what career they would like to go into. The humanities degree for this student may be the 'exploration' stage of their life cycle (Super, 1990), learning about whom they are, what they enjoy and what they're good at. This could also be a way of delaying the decision-making process. As humanities courses are non-vocational, it means the range of options at the end is very broad. Some graduates may struggle making career decisions upon graduation, depending on the level of guidance they received during their degree. As Schwartz suggests "As the number of options increases, the effort required to make a good decision escalates" (Schwartz, 2004, p.48). These graduates may struggle with making a career choice. They may have a 'hesitant' approach to career decision making (Arroba, 1977) and effectively decide not to decide by taking up further study upon graduation. This fits well with the increasingly high volume of humanities students who have decided to undertake post-graduate study in recent DLHE surveys (HECSU, 2018). It also aligns with the previous discussions about humanities graduates needing more time "due to extended exploration of varied possibilities" (Guy, 2017, p.32).

3.2 Graduate destinations

For some humanities graduates, their horizons for action (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997) are limited to what is available, what is advertised and what they know. We discussed previously the mainstream careers events such as law and teaching recruitment fairs, and we understand that careers such as teaching are a longstanding tradition for graduates of humanities. This could also explain why so many humanities graduates choose to take up

this profession; are they fully aware of the other options open to them? We also know there have been severe cuts to jobs in arts and culture in England, so if these opportunities are not readily available to humanities graduates, how much agency do they have over the current structure for arts and humanities in England? (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). This reinforces the importance of enterprise education for all (Young, 2014). Do we need to encourage more humanities graduates to exercise entrepreneurship; setting-up their own businesses and creating the opportunities that the current structure does not readily permit?

We know that there are humanities graduates who have successful enterprising careers (Croucher et al., 2007). Holland's Hexagon (Holland, 1997) categorised enterprising professionals as those with skills of persuasion, influence and leadership. These are not typically skills humanities students have claimed to develop during their degree. However, many of the 29 enterprising humanities graduates in the study demonstrated the typical skills and values of a humanities graduate, such as personal fulfilment, intellectual enjoyment and passion for helping others by creating employment opportunities (Croucher et al, 2007). Their enterprising success could be linked to personal qualities of strong-will, tenacity and the desire for flexibility in their lives. A third of these graduates also had family members who run or had run a business (Croucher et al, 2007). Bill Law's community interaction theory (Law, 1981) would suggest that the information and support from these family members could have had a big impact on their career choice and success of starting their own businesses. Therefore, humanities graduates can use their skills and values, their extracurricular experiences and knowledge, as well as their community networks to have successful enterprising careers. This may increase in the future due to the funding cuts which Arts Council England has published, and the increase in enterprise education amongst young people.

3.3 Preparing for the future

Krumboltz suggests that careers should not, or can not necessarily be planned. We do not know what jobs will exist in the future, and therefore we should remain undecided or 'open-minded' about career prospects. He believes it is necessary for students to experience unplanned events and to recognise the opportunities which arise from these events to act and benefit from them (Krumboltz, 2008). This supports the vocation of a humanities student, who has chosen a non-vocational degree discipline to potentially keep their options open. The subjects are not supported by employment-driven curriculums and instead develop cultural awareness and sensitivity, empathy and a variety of other transferable skills. We previously discussed that humanities graduates acquire the ability to be adaptable and develop an ability to cope with uncertainty. Krumboltz's happenstance learning theory is thus

very applicable to today's economy, and the uncertainty of what the labour market will look like over the forthcoming decades. It is also very applicable to the non-vocational subject discipline and the skills-set developed by humanities graduates. This dictates that they will be prepared to enter just about anything, even if this includes further study, changing their environment or re-training.

Savickas describes traditional vocational methods in careers as no longer fit for purpose. He builds on the idea of being prepared for an uncertain future in his career adaptability theory (Savickas, 1997) where he discusses the need to prepare students to exercise concern, control, curiosity and confidence. This work has recently been built upon with the Career Adaptability Dimensions (Savickas, 2013). Savickas argues that we need to be equipped for rapid speed of change, for society's approach to 'dejobbing', for a career full of uncertainty, part-time work, temporary and freelance work, these so called 'portfolio' careers or 'boundaryless careers'. (Savickas, 2013). Graduates of today need to be able to continuously learn new skills, upskill their existing skillset and be flexible in responding to rapid and constant change. So how prepared are humanities students for this? If we re-consider the skills humanities graduates will have acquired during their degree, such as flexibility, inquisition and ability to cope with uncertainty, this career theory therefore prescribes that our humanities graduates could thrive in the current and fourth coming economic climate if they recognise and draw on those acquired strengths to fill in the gaps that STEM graduates may not be able to fill.

Part 4. Gap analysis

4.1 Gaps identified within the existing literature:

There is a lack of literature on humanities academics and their perception of graduate employability, which may be crucial when we consider issues of student motivation, and curriculum design to promote student awareness of transferrable, and "unique" skills. Further and more recent research is needed on humanities graduates who have become successful entrepreneurs and business owners. More research could be conducted on the specific employability provision that humanities departments run for humanities students, as well as how the provision is resourced and promoted and how students are recruited onto these events. More research is needed on humanities placement modules- the take-up and the impact. There is also a lack of research on the availability of humanities placement year opportunities in the UK and how these can be further developed. There is also a possible need for more research to be undertaken on employability within the humanities curriculum,

have specific frameworks been developed across many humanities departments, and what is the best employability approach for humanities students?

4.3 Addressing the gaps

My dissertation research will begin to address some of these gaps as I will be conducting in-depth qualitative and semi-structured interviews with humanities academics. I will be exploring their awareness of the graduate labour market, and what they believe a humanities degree equips a student with. I will also be exploring their specific employability provision for humanities students, the take-up of this provision as well as the impact. I will also be trying to gauge their knowledge and experience of humanities placements, and how we might build on the opportunities which are currently available. Finally, I will be facilitating discussions to ascertain their preferred approach to employability for humanities students.

Chapter 3: Research Design

Part 1. Methodology

This chapter will outline the methodology used to design my research study. It will also explore the justifications for using these particular methods as well as the ethical issues which needed to be carefully considered before undertaking the study.

Qualitative research uses words as data (Braun and Clarke, 2018) and “produces in-depth, rich and detailed data” (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.21). I chose to undertake a small-scale qualitative study to give an insight into HAs knowledge, perceptions, experiences and values regarding student motivations, skills and mind-set. I also wanted to explore HAs thoughts on graduate employment and their preferred approaches to employability. I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with HAs.

“The purpose of the qualitative research interviews is to obtain descriptions of the lived word of the interviewees” (Kvale, 1996, p.124). This fits in with the overall purpose of the research study, to understand the HAs perceptions of their students and their courses. What motivates their students? What makes them employable as humanities graduates? What employability initiatives would the academics prefer to use? The qualitative research interviews gave me the platform to explore these areas in greater depth, including some of the underlying values, perceptions and opinions which underpin them. “Interviews – in particular in-depth interviews – lend themselves to the collection of data based on: Opinions, feelings, emotions and experiences. The nature of these means that they need to be explored in depth and in detail rather than simply reported in a word or two”. (Denscombe, 2003, p.174).

The semi-structured interviews also permitted me to explore unexpected themes which arose, in greater depth through additional questioning and the use of probing. Further justification for in-depth interviews is the access to ‘hard to reach’ information, available from “key players in the field who can give privileged information” (Denscombe, 2003, p.174). In order to conduct a good quality qualitative research interview, the interview should produce lengthy in-depth and relevant responses; short stories which require little explanation (Kvale, 1996). I believe the interviews I undertook encompass these features, from the quality of responses you will see in the findings chapter, and from the length of the interviews, which ranged from 28- 83 minutes.

I prepared 10 questions which formed an Interview Guide (Appendix 4) as a framework for the interviews in order to guide the conversation (Braun and Clarke, 2013). The questions

were prepared based on the original research aims and objectives, as well as pre-identified themes I hoped to explore during the interviews.

Part 2. Data collection

I undertook four semi-structured in-depth interviews with HAs in June 2018. I used a cluster sampling method (Biggam, 2008) to source participants through an internal Invitation to Participate (Appendix 1) which I sent to all HAs across the two selected humanities subject areas at a post-92 English university. Obtaining a larger sample size would have brought great difficulty when drawing on practicalities such as confidentiality within the department, as well as the availability of the participants, given the nature of their work. It would have also been difficult to transcribe and analyse a larger number of in-depth interviews given the timeframe of the study.

The four participants teach across two humanities subject areas, two who teach English and two who teach History. The HAs who took part in the study, teach undergraduate part-time and full-time students across levels four to six at a post-92 English university. Although this would not constitute a representative sample of the entirety of humanities subjects, it has allowed me to meaningfully compare themes arising from the interviews across two subject areas. The in-depth nature of the interviews has allowed a thorough exploration of themes arising which, in this type of qualitative research (which is not seeking to build “theory”), is arguably more important than the sample size.

Four HAs responded via email that they were happy to partake in the study. I then emailed the respondents the Participation Information Sheet (Appendix 2) and organised a date and time, as well as a confidential private setting on campus, in order to undertake the interviews.

I provided each participant with a Consent Form (Appendix 3) which was discussed, signed and dated by each participant prior to the start of each interview.

I recorded each of the four interviews using a voice recorder, which each participant consented. The interviews lasted between 28- 83 minutes due to the varying length in the respondents’ answers. The recorded interviews were then categorised and anonymised and saved to my personal computer as password protected files.

As an experienced guidance professional, I am accustomed to undertaking thorough discussions with clients about sensitive subjects, including feelings, concerns, motivations, values and opinions. I used this existing knowledge and skill-set to help conduct the in-depth

interviews using a participant-centred approach to qualitative interviewing (McCrorry and O'Donnell, 2016). I undertook a 'contracting process' at the start of each interview to introduce myself and my role to the participants, to remind them of the research aims, to discuss how the interview will proceed, and to allow them an opportunity to ask questions before the interview began (McCrorry and O'Donnell, 2016). It is argued that qualitative research interviews share a link with career counselling interviews (Amundson, 2003). I did notice similarities between my research interviews and my experience of guidance interviewing. The interviews allowed the participants to discuss some sensitive issues, as well as their frustrations and professional challenges in a confidential, impartial and non-judgmental setting. It gave the participants an outlet and a platform to discuss some of these topics at length, which may have otherwise not been disclosed.

I then transcribed each of the four interviews manually using a word document to type up each audio to create an orthographic transcript record (Braun and Clarke, 2013). I played back each interview numerous times to ensure I was accurate in my transcription of both spoken words and non-semantic sounds (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

Part 3. Data analysis

I decided to conduct a thematic analysis of the qualitative data findings as this method of data analysis is flexible in its entirety. It also allowed me to approach the data analysis from both a 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' fashion (Braun and Clarke, 2013). In that, it allowed me to draw on both the themes which I sought to explore through conducting the study, and the unexpected themes which arose within the study.

To ensure a robust approach to the analysis was undertaken, I followed Braun & Clarke's six stage approach to thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006):

A. Familiarising yourself with your data

During each interview, I made initial notes against each response to the interview questions. I thought this may be useful during the data analysis stages, as even though each audio recording was to be transcribed, the transcription can never be a true depiction of the original research interview. This is because intonations, facial expressions and physical gestures won't translate to an audio recording. "With each step, information is lost or changed in some way" (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.162). I therefore felt it important to make notes at the time of interviewing, so that my perceptions of each response and reaction to the questions were as authentic and accurate as possible.

To further familiarise myself with the data, I listened to each of the four interviews and initially created a handwritten mind-map of key phrases and themes identified. (Appendix 6).

I then transcribed each interview, creating an orthographic transcript record. I listened to each interview audio several times, to ensure my transcriptions were accurate and of a high quality.

B. Generating initial codes

To help me in identifying preliminary codes, I used NVivo 11 software to organise and categorise my data. I uploaded each of the four transcribed interviews as 'sources'. I then went through each transcription (or source) and began highlighting key phrases or sentences. Each time I highlighted a piece of text, I then set-up a Node (or code) which the quotation would then be saved under. Once I had gone through and coded each transcription, I then repeated the process, as some codes needed to be cross-referenced across multiple codes. This software ensured I was robust in storing, organising and coding the data in a concise and manageable way. At the end of this process I ended up with an NVivo Codebook (Appendix 7) which illustrated the number of references against each code, and how many sources (or transcriptions) contained references to these codes.

C. Searching for themes

The next step undertaken was to go through the codebook, and see which codes had the highest number of references within it. I then analysed which codes appeared more frequently across each of the sources. I then went back over my mind-maps created during my first listen to each audio. The next step taken was to group codes together into themes and sub-themes. At this stage I went through each transcript again to ensure better accuracy. This stage also helped to clarify what the underlying themes were.

D. Reviewing themes

Once I had a list of themes and sub-themes, a further stage was undertaken to review whether some of the themes could be merged or discarded based on my original research aims. At this stage I merged initial themes created an electronic thematic analysis mind-map to illustrate core themes and sub-themes (Appendix 8). I devised seven core themes:

- Motivations
- Employability provision
- Engagement with employability
- Graduate destinations

- Employability skills
- Preferred approaches to employability
- Labour market

E. Defining and naming themes

During this stage of the process I refined theme names to ensure they were clear and concise. I also refined the sub-themes into key findings illustrated on the electronic thematic analysis mind-map.

F. Presenting the data

This section has been put together in the 'findings' and the 'discussion' chapters. Here, I have presented key extracts which demonstrated the core themes. I have interrogated the extracts against the original literature discussed in the literature review and synthesised to come up with my own interpretations of the impact of the findings.

Part 4. Ethics process

The research study was approved by the University of West Scotland in May 2018 (Appendix 5). All interviewees were sourced using cluster sampling methods at a post-92 university. All interviewees were voluntary participants. I shared participant information forms before the interviews were arranged and gained written consent from each of the participants for the interviews to be conducted and recorded. These recordings were anonymised and saved to a private computer as HA1, HA2, HA3 and HA4. Once I had manually transcribed each audio recording, the transcriptions were named HA1, HA2, HA3, HA4 and password protected to my private computer. I then uploaded the four transcriptions to NVivo11 software on my private computer to begin the thematic analysis process. At this point, the original audio recordings were deleted from both the computer and the digital recorder. I approached the interviews with transparency, a non-judgmental attitude and demonstrated complete impartiality. This was a challenge because I was playing the role of a researcher whilst being in-post as a guidance professional, and the area of study was very close to both my educational background and my profession. Much of the questioning and responses directly related to my subject specialisms and the work that I undertake. I ensured that I remained professional and impartial throughout. The respondents were also informed that they did not have to answer a question if they did not wish to. Being employed as a guidance professional, I am well accustomed to conducting interviews of a sensitive nature. This helped me to effectively apply a participant centred approach to the interviews (McCrorry

and O'Donnell, 2016) to effectively build rapport, and put the participants at ease. The participants were aware of the role I undertake. I therefore had limited control over how the participants would view me, and this may have had an impact on how they responded to the questions.

Chapter 4: Findings

I am now going to present the significant findings across key themes which arose from the four in-depth interviews I undertook.

Part 1. Motivations

1.1 When asked about students' initial career ideas at the point of choosing their humanities degree, all four interviewees discussed the prospect of a teaching career as a reason for why students chose to study a humanities degree:

HA1: *"A significant portion of them have education in mind, they think, assume that teaching is a probability and a possibility."*

HA2: *"I haven't come across a lot of things other than teaching."*

HA3: *"In our department we get a lot of people who want to go into teaching."*

HA4: *"People who enjoyed their own pupil experience so much that they do think teaching would become, would be something that I'm interested in. And of course, it is a very traditional subject from which to go into that."*

This demonstrates that the academics who were interviewed assumed that teaching was a likely course motivation and career choice. Even though humanities subjects are traditionally seen as non-vocational, teaching is deemed to be a likely vocational option for the students.

1.2 When specifically asked about the broader motivations for undergraduate students choosing to study a humanities degree, various motives were discussed. However, there were repetitions of themes and also of key influencers supporting the student to make their decision:

HA1: *"Some of them think it's going to be useful, that can contribute to a lot of different vocations".*

HA1: *"Some of them do like literature, they like to read. They have done well in it"*

HA1: *"That their parents will see this; have had an influence, significant impact on their choices, both, the university they go to and what they're allowed to study."*

HA1: *"46- 47% of our students are young Asian women."*

HA1: *"These young women are here as a compromise... the expectations are they're going to get their degree and then get married and raise a family".*

HA2: *"But seeing more as a preparation for something vocational afterwards. So people who then wanted to go into various different career paths".*

HA2: *"They've been guided more from the passion of their subject."*

HA3: *"a love of reading... a love of writing"*

HA4: *"It still leaves open, you're not tied to anything. You have got a degree with transferable skills".*

HA4: *"Because they enjoyed school history"*

HA4: *"History is a subject, the subject that people take in their dotage... they've got a fascination"*

Various motivations and influences were discussed above. Some academics believe students are motivated by the subject and that it is transferable to many career vocations in the future. Other motivations which were discussed include cultural and parental influences, as well as a genuine passion for the subject.

Part 2. Engagement with employability

2.1i Student engagement with employability

There appears to have been an increase in the number of humanities students who have become career focused at an earlier stage owing to the rise of course fees

HA1: *"They are increasingly asking at open days, what can I do besides teach? Not necessarily from the parents. If the parent comes they always ask that question, but the students also are starting to ask that question?"*

HA3: *"So of course they're going to be worrying about how they're going to pay it back and whether there'll be a job for them at the end. I'm noticing that's a lot of my students' anxiety now. It's not just the weight of, I need to pass this next essay, or I need to do well on my degree. If I don't then I'm*

going to have a lot of debt and I'm not going to have a career to go on to. So I think that's where the added pressure comes from."

HA4: *"I've had students who considered this right from the start, and almost obsessively where I felt like saying, look, focus right now on... we're talking about level four, don't let this angst about- I need to find a job at the end, and partly because of the debt. They're the ones who can see ahead at the end and think, I need to pay this off. I try and say, it's good that you should think about it positive, but it is also really important that you let go of some of that angst because you need to settle in and enjoy your degree to do as well as you possibly could."*

Humanities lecturers are suggesting that the rise in course fees is causing students to become career focused at an earlier stage but is also creating angst and anxiety over paying back fees and gaining the return on their investment.

One subject has seen some good engagement with employability through the role of course rep:

HA1: *"So, that is beginning to show dividends in level 4. They tend to do it again in level 5 and 6, which benefits us because we get their outlook on all sorts of things; designing curriculum and changing assessment and sitting on review panels as a student voice; so there is, it's a gentle trend, these are a minority... So, we ask for course reps from every module, so we want to see at least 23 people there. For the bigger modules, like the introduction to literature module, we'll take as many as 3 or 4 because there will be up to 60 students in there. If we can get 3 or 4 people interested. Sometimes a couple of years ago, at the height of our committee, we had 10 members of staff there and 35 students."*

2.1ii Student dis-engagement with employability

Placements

There is a reoccurring reference that there is a low-uptake of placement opportunities amongst humanities students:

HA1: *"We have a peculiar inability to get, so far to get students to do our work placement level 6 module. We've never taught it because we've never had a student do it"*

HA1: *"I think they're afraid of it because it's not classroom based, it's not what they're used to, it's very unlike school... We ended up sending him to HR, he stapled memos and photocopied for four months"*

HA2: *"I know the take-up is not enormous on that... if you've taken up a vocational degree, you're more like to take up work placements. That is your mind-set. That is a consideration you've taken on board before your degree. It is hard to commit people who actively chosen not to go down that route"*

that you still have to do that, we are going to put some vocational stuff in here. But I chose history, because I don't want to, I just want to still learn"

HA4: *"What we ask is that students come along with the idea for a placement, and I think that's an important one. Forcing them to go and contact, not us contacting... it's a real important part that students criticise – oh why don't you provide it, Coventry provide it."*

According to these participants, the option of a placement doesn't appear to fit with the non-vocation element of the humanities degree discipline. The placement requires students to find their own placement and work outside of the familiar classroom setting. It also appears that there is reference to the quality of the placement being quite poor in terms of developing the students' employability.

There is also a reference which alludes that if an employability activity is optional, or is not assessed, then few students choose to engage with it:

HA1: *"I just took the students to London... we go to the globe; we've been going to the globe every year for eight years, first Saturday in June, to see a Shakespeare performance. I think we had 7 students this time out of... we pitched it to the whole school of humanities. So out of 470 students we had 7. Last year we got 10"*

HA1: *"So it's, if they don't get a grade for it, it's very difficult to get them interested in doing it. That's true of the learning café. The very things they need the most.. you can't tie everything to a module, you can't tie everything to one of their marks. So they are increasingly mercenary about it. And I don't know how to get around that. But some of the stuff that they would get the most benefit from in terms of employability, is the stuff that they don't see the point of. Like seminars."*

2.2i Staff engagement with employability

Personal tutors

Some lecturers engage their students with careers and employability through individual conversations and personal tutor time.

HA3: *"But I find I'm also having quite a lot of discussions with my third-year students as well, especially dissertation students, because you get more of a personal relationship with them, I suppose, about their career options, what they are doing."*

HA3: *"Often if I have a student who is very stressed out with their work, and come for extra tuition, then I'll be asking where are you aiming to get with this degree. Likewise, if I have students who are*

quite very disengaged, I often try and have that conversation too because a lot of that tends to happen, either their part-time job is taking over a bit, or they're not entirely sure what they want to do with it either."

HA4: *"I teach the two modules where we have got silver employability... it's through personal tutor relationships where those work. Students approach you individually and we tell them about... well, we encourage them to look in places where they want to look, and through the volunteering programme also. To encourage them to realise that it's any career, as long as it involves communication, information and critical thinking I'd imagine"*.

HA4: *"And that's happened in a hearteningly, only this semester, four, five cases. Which may not sound like a lot...? I'm not saying that that would work with every personal tutor. Personal tutors get allocated like a lottery. It's like speed dating. Not even that's it's a lottery, and not all students take us up on the offer."*

Humanities academics can have successful careers and employability conversations when it is individual and tailored to a conversation with one student and their specific situation.

2.2ii Staff dis-engagement with employability

There is reference to a number of factors for why academic staff choose not to engage with employability:

HA1: *"We have... a lot of mature members of staff who are close to retirement and who are just trying to cling on to what they do between now and their retirement... I'm looking forward to getting some of these new lecturers who are on the job market, you can see are doing all this already on their CVs, to make themselves marketable, and who can help us go for the employability stuff and the outreach, and impact in a big way"*

HA2: *"Some people are going to be less proactive in terms of hammering home vocational elements to the course, they think it's distracting from the academic rigour and focus, and it is a difficult balance. At the end of the day, most students probably want to get jobs after they've graduated"*.

Part 3. Graduate destinations

3.1 One humanities academic discusses the idea that few graduate careers for humanities students, allow you to keep doing your subject within the role.

HA1: *"but it would be nice if we could develop a more extensive approach to it which goes beyond education. In terms of humanities, subjects like philosophy, how do you sell philosophy, how do you get philosophers to think about marketing themselves to the outside world. So it's this... humanities will always have a bit of a problem, as an academic subject... critical instead of a process piece."*

HA2: *“So perhaps, slightly differently from subjects. Because there is no obvious career at the end, it’s not a vocational course in the same sense as maybe law or business or other things in our faculty might be. So those have clear jobs at the end, history less so”*

HA2: *“I think it is already the problem with degrees like history, the number of direct jobs that you can link to your degree at the end are so limited. I think, in terms of people saying I’m going to go in and I’m going to do exactly what I’m doing during my degree, in my job. The odds of doing that are very very small, compared to some other topics I suppose”*

The above findings suggest that there is an assumption amongst participants that graduates would like to use their degree subject knowledge directly within a graduate role.

3.2 Postgraduate study

It was discussed that some humanities graduates go on to complete further study as they are not yet in a position to decide their career pathway and wish to delay the decision-making process.

HA2: *“Or a lot people think, if I still don’t know then, I will maybe do a postgraduate year, and then I will make my mind up.”*

Some students complete further study to increase their skill-set and increase their career options.

HA2: *“Equally I know people who have gone into teacher training from history degrees who have done that because they thought even if they didn’t like it, it would be a useful skill set to have. You know, it would show some more vocational skills, more concretely than the assumed skills of a historian might have”*

Further study can allow humanities students to gain vocational skills and vocational skills that they may not have developed during their humanities degree.

Part 4. Employability skills

Participants referred to a broad range of skills that students should obtain through completing a humanities degree:

HA1: *“Employer’s who’s got an applicant with a degree in English, whether its English literature or English language, they’re assuming that you’ve got top notch communication skills there”*

HA1: *“Because we’re good with ideas, we’re good at framing things in catchy ways. We’re good at increasingly working with images, because a lot of our degree is not just reading books, its dealing*

with the ways in which books or ideas or poems or songs get represented visually. So English students have spent time on their assignments with, in other media, besides the written word on the page. So companies recognise that; they need people to not only talk to the outside world on their behalf, but also to their own staff, and communicate management's ideas to them"

HA2: *"Analysing, explaining, presenting that sort of information. And again, these are skills that lots of degrees will claim, but I suppose those are things you'd expect history to be particularly strong at."*

HA3: *"They're also really good at empathy as well which I think is a skill which is not focused on enough in a lot of different things. But being able to debate with your colleagues respectfully, being able to empathise with authors or characters in books I think is actually a really useful skill for employers as well. Certainly for cohesiveness in their company"*

HA4: *"As a historian or a trainee historian, you are effectively liaising with the present and the past. Which has no voice unless you give a voice to the past, and that it's often difficult to bridge that gap."*

It was also suggested that some humanities students have a lack of self-awareness when it comes to their skills which could make it difficult for them to articulate them to a potential employer:

HA3: *"I ran an hour-long session on 'what can you do with a degree in English'? And pointed out all of the many many skills they got and how you could use that in a CV and the sorts of jobs you could apply for. And I was kind of surprised at how many of students were kind of shocked at the skills they'd learnt. That they weren't aware of how transferable they were to lots of different industries".*

There was also some discussion about students entering their degrees with weaker skills than in previous years:

HA1: *"The red bricks... and the newcomers... are poaching our students, and we're recruiting students with weaker and weaker skills, and fewer and fewer entry qualifications."*

This may suggest that more work needs to be done during university to ensure graduates leave university with the expected standard of skills.

Part 5. Preferred approaches to employability

The humanities academics came up with an interesting range of suggestions to improve and tailor employability for humanities students:

HA1: *"If we could get some of our mature part-time students back, think about a way financially to make that happen, because those people did do jobs, they did have lives, do have lives, they have experience, they bring it into the classroom and traditionally they talk twice as much as the 18- 19 year olds, that doesn't mean they 18 and 19 year olds aren't learning from them; the economic thing since the fees were tripled has decimated across the country part-time"*

HA1: *"we're trying to get them to learn from each other, talk to each other, To get level 4 students into the room as often as possible with level 6 students. And to listen to them, who are at the end of their degree, see what they've learned and what they wish they would have started to do earlier, including and especially the employability thing."*

HA2: *"I think there would be value in having that across a wider range of career paths. I suppose it's so difficult because history is such a broad... it leads to such a broad array of different career paths. And to get people in who would attract enough students would be difficult."*

HA2: *"Because, sometimes people need to see it as an option, literally need to go to parliament, but there's that inspirational thing, we all know, all sorts of research has been done into history lessons in schools show one of the things students take away, things that they remember from school are the trips."*

HA2: *"I suppose... bringing in people who have done history, who have gone on to do something that is quite outside of the obvious... But maybe, find someone who did then say, Ok, here's somebody who went way outside of what you thought you could do with a history degree, and here's how they have done it."*

HA3: *"Because they can analyse the job description, work out exactly what is needed and they can work out and evaluate how far they meet those, but often they don't really get how to apply those skills to real life. But really I think English students are best placed to help others write CVs and cover letters and that sort of thing, because it's what they train to do"*

HA3: *"they're the experts in their own careers a lot of the time. Especially, if they have already got jobs or they know where they want to go. Having them share their anxieties and share their experiences and offer peer help I think is really important. Academics are really badly placed to advise on careers because, academia is such a weird career anyway. You can train for ages and still not get a job, we have such a skewed view of what work is I think, what the job market is that I think the students are probably better placed to educate each other."*

HA3: *"But also a kind of general support from the university for students wanting to use their initiative, and say, wanting to put on a play as part of the artsfest or that kind of thing. So I think perhaps links*

between the careers service, the arts groups and facilities, and looking at how we could do that. It might be that a student wants to organise a conference... we've got all of the space and resources for that without it costing us anything, so we should find ways to do that"

HA3: *"Use your alumni networks, so get people back who are doing the career that students will want to do. Get them to talk about their journey from ... onto whatever they went onto, and really publicise the fact that they were... alumni. Because if you could see somebody doing the job you want to do, who is a bit like you, then you're more likely to feel like you can do that as well. I think that's really important actually because we have such a diverse student population"*

HA4: *"If it wasn't so difficult we would also set up joints across faculties, outside the faculty boundaries... Anything that usually takes you outside your own department, creates pressures on your co-operating with people who may be under very different pressures within their own departments"*

HA4: *"Now one thing I would put into the curriculum, teach people rhetoric."*

HA4: *"So there were things when I looked through the trips, and they weren't all trips, it's so discriminatory because our students can't just hike off. They've got childcare commitments, a lot of them. And there's so many issues with that, what the people were then excluded from and then they had their noses rubbed into the fact that, all of a sudden, as if money's no object, and then they can't go because... we don't lay on crèches, free crèches, free childcare, free childcare above the age of seven ...More could happen but you need to resource it"*

Some of the participants' suggestions for their preferred approaches to employability also demonstrated the challenges these ideas present for staff and students to engage with employability.

Part 6. Graduate employers' expectations

The humanities academics discussed key skills which they believe graduate employers expect from humanities graduates:

HA1: *"employers who's got an applicant with a degree in English, whether it's English literature or English language, they're assuming that you've got top notch communication skills there."*

HA2: *"that it's you know, full of transferable skills ; it's a well-regarded subject , and it's something employers look at and say history Ok, history is a good subject , it must show a good base of skills-communication, written , verbal, so lots of useful things to go on any jobs"*

Communication skills appear to be a key skill that humanities lecturers believe employers are looking for from graduates.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This research study set out to answer the following questions from the perspective of HAs:

1. What do HAs feel a humanities degree equips student to do upon graduation?
2. What are HAs' views on graduate employability for humanities students?
3. What are HAs' preferred methods of delivering employability for humanities students?

My literature review raised some positive viewpoints around graduate destinations for humanities students including those who have gone on to run their own business. The literature suggested that humanities students gain transferable and specialist skills, including empathy, cultural awareness, communication and research skills. The literature discussed that humanities students were interested in intrinsic rewards and values such as helping others and personal fulfilment rather than financial gains. Some of the literature also focused on current employability initiatives for humanities students such as employability frameworks and skills matrices, as well as events including teaching and law fairs. There were suggestions that humanities students would like more careers support at an earlier stage within the degree, specifically in securing work-based learning opportunities such as placements. Some graduates raised challenges around others' perceptions of their humanities degree and the value of it. The literature also highlighted negative aspects of work-based learning opportunities for humanities students, such as a lack of placement opportunities. Looking at labour market sources such as Arts Council England, there have been severe funding cuts to arts and culture in the UK recently. In turn, this has an impact on the graduate jobs available to students in those fields, potentially leading to an increase in the number of students who will need to think more laterally- transferring their skills to other areas and creating their own opportunities. There has been increased growth in the number of school leavers entering STEM subjects, and with the sharp increase in student fees in 2012, there has been an increased spotlight on the value of humanities degrees in the rapidly changing labour market as technology continues to revolutionise the workplace.

There was a sufficient amount of literature highlighting humanities graduate destinations, humanities graduates' perspectives on what they gained from their degree, their motivations to study their particular degree and the skills and opportunities the degree equipped them with. However, there was very little literature available from the viewpoint of humanities lecturers who support the recruitment of students, who teach students and who act as personal tutors to support and guide students. I decided to conduct a small-scale qualitative

study based on semi-structured in-depth interviews with HAs at a post-92 university in England. I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of why HAs believed students chose to take-up the degree subject, what they perceived and understood of graduate employability for their students, what employability opportunities they provided them with and ultimately, what were their preferred approaches towards employability initiatives for their students. I hope to use the learning gained to inform future practice of careers and employability provision for humanities students within higher education.

The research illustrated that HAs were good at articulating the skills their students should gain and develop, on successful completion of their degree. These were discussions that lecturers would have with the students as early as the university open days. However, some HAs stated that students were not necessarily aware of the skills they gain during their degree, and discussed methods to improve self-awareness. The findings also highlighted that HAs had a keen interest in knowing the destinations of some of their graduates. They discussed graduate destinations, including further study options and graduate careers in teaching and law. They also discussed careers such as graduate management programmes and accountancy, where their graduates have transferred their learning gained into new areas. The findings showed that HAs were increasingly having these discussions about graduate destinations at open days, and that students were now more engaged with the employability aspects of their course, at a much earlier stage than ever before.

Some of the significant findings in this research study were based on student and staff engagement with employability initiatives. HAs perceived that humanities students were less likely to engage with employability activities unless it was a compulsory part of their course. They also expressed that student take-up on opportunities such as the work-based learning module is very low. Humanities academics stated in the findings that they would like student engagement to increase across the opportunities available to them. It was also highlighted that some HAs don't engage with employability for a variety of reasons including time and resource, as well as the stage they are at within their careers. This is significant when we consider the potential lack of consistency across humanities courses in employability provision for students and engagement amongst staff and their students. This is potentially another argument for an embedded curriculum model of employability across all humanities subjects to ensure fair access.

It is evident from the findings that many employability opportunities were available to humanities students throughout their degree, including course rep opportunities, career fairs, learning labs, off-site visits, employer talks, CV workshops and an employability award. What was significant was that all of the HAs heavily referenced a career in teaching as a traditional

and popular destination for humanities students. As a result, lots of support and initiatives are available to support this pathway, such as a four-year degree with QTS, 'getting into teaching' talks and application and interview support sessions. Although I had anticipated these provisions were on offer, the HAs referenced this career choice as one of the few careers available for students to be able to continue 'doing' their subject in the workplace. It poses the question as to whether students are unconsciously taking up this career option as they may lack opportunity-awareness in other areas, or not enough is being done to teach students how to be adaptable and transfer their learning and skills gained into new areas.

Other key findings illustrated how HAs would prefer to approach employability. Some of their suggestions presented greater challenges, based on the university's overall employability strategy, or challenges on a departmental level. Some of the suggested approaches including making better use of personal tutor meetings, making better use of university facilities and a more collaborative approach in cross-faculty working, through the medium of cross-faculty programmes, modules and employability opportunities.

I am going to explore some of the significant findings in greater depth across the following key themes that arose in the study:

- 1. Employability skills**
- 2. Graduate destinations**
- 3. Engagement with employability**
- 4. Humanities academics' preferred approach to employability**

Part 1. Employability skills

The literature review highlighted that humanities students develop specialist transferable skills such as empathy, cultural awareness and the ability to cope with uncertainty (The Right Skills Report, 2017). The literature made some interesting references about the continued need for humanities graduates to work alongside technology to be able to learn from the past and shape legal and ethical frameworks as technologies such as Artificial Intelligence continues to expand within the workplace. The HAs did refer to some of the aforementioned skills within this study:

HA 3: *"They're also really good at empathy as well which I think is a skill which is not focused on enough in a lot of different things. But being able to debate with your colleagues respectfully, being able to empathise with authors or characters in books I think is actually a really useful skill for employers as well. Certainly, for cohesiveness in their company"*

HA4: *“As an historian or a trainee historian, you are effectively liaising with the present and the past. Which has no voice unless you give a voice to the past, and that it's often difficult to bridge that gap.”*

From the literature, it was not clear as to whether humanities students were fully aware of the skills they had developed throughout their degree. Within the study, the HAs affirmed that they believed their students lacked self-awareness when it comes to skills:

HA3: *“I was kind of surprised at how many of students were kind of shocked at the skills they'd learnt. That they weren't aware of how transferable they were to lots of different industries”.*

Given the current economic climate, arguably, our students must be able to identify the skills they have developed, how they have developed them and what this means for future employment. Rather than focus on graduate jobs which align to the subject matter, humanities students perhaps need to be able to identify and match their skills to tasks and positions. The labour market requires graduates to be able to adapt to new environments and new roles that may not exist yet by utilizing their skills and strengths. Many university programmes do include personal development plans and other opportunities for students to reflect on skills and areas of development. So perhaps what our students lack, is the ability to identify skills developed within an educational setting and place that skill within a new context such as the workplace.

Part 2. Graduate destinations

A significant finding which arose within this theme, was the idea that a career in teaching is one of the few vocational careers a humanities student can pursue in order to continue delivering their subject in the workplace. The subject of teaching as a career, arose 20 times across the four semi-structured interviews.

HA1: *“A significant portion of them have education in mind, they think, assume that teaching is a probability and a possibility.”*

HA2: *“I haven't come across a lot of things other than teaching”*

HA3: *“In our department we get a lot of people who want to go into teaching”*

HA4: *“People who enjoyed their own pupil experience so much that they do think teaching would become, would be something that I'm interested in. And of course, it is a very traditional subject from which to go into that”.*

It is clear from the findings, that humanities academics assume teaching as a career, is a common motivation for taking up the humanities degree subject.

The literature review supported the pursuit of a career in teaching, with data illustrating that around one quarter of English and Language graduates who enrolled onto further study, were doing postgraduate qualification in education. The statistics for history graduates was slightly lower, at 14.9% (HECSU, 2018). Although the figures are high compared to the UK national average, the data did suggest that there had been a recent decrease in the number of applicants for post-graduate teaching courses in the UK for subjects such as English and History. This could be due to various factors such as the newly introduced master's loans from Student Finance England.

So what can we infer from the findings? It seems apparent that many students are still interested and go on to pursue a postgraduate qualification in education. The HAs were aware of this and made heavy reference to this in the study. They referenced this topic across many of the key themes such as motivations, skills, destinations and employability provisions:

HA1: *“Education is still going to be a substantial draw, as a profession, we have secondary and primary education admissions tutors from the education institute... to come in semester 1, and offer workshops for the students about filling in PGCE applications, and what they need to do now in order to prepare them for that.”*

My thoughts as a careers guidance professional is that many humanities students might look to this career because they are simply unaware of alternative options; they may be unsure how to transfer their experiences and skillset to new areas or because employability provisions for humanities students are too narrowly focused on few vocational careers such as teaching. It also raises the question as to how influential humanities academics are when it comes to students making their career choice. Whether it is through leading questions:

HA2: *“when I asked about teaching specifically, a bit of a leading question I suppose, quite a lot of people put their hand up as something they were thinking of or had in mind as something that they might do when they finish”*

or indirectly through a heavier weight being placed on the career of teaching, it will undoubtedly have some impact on career choice. Perhaps HAs perceptions of the teaching profession and students' perceptions of the teaching profession could be further researched.

Another interesting point which was raised about further study in particular, was that some students might choose to continue with further study as a means to delay the decision making process. Possibly because they are simply not ready to decide their graduate career, and believe further study will help them with their employability:

HA2: *“Or a lot people think, if I still don’t know then, I will maybe do a postgraduate year, and then I will make my mind up.”*

HA2: *“Who’ve gone on to do postgraduate courses because they are still interested but also because they still haven’t fully decided what they want to do, and they think it will increase their options”*

The literature review highlighted an increase in postgraduate study, potentially as a response to the newly introduced Masters loans in 2015, which would allow students to take-up student finance in England for any full master’s programme. This will almost certainly have had an impact on the statistics as now students have more access to master’s courses, now the barrier of finding upfront fees has been lifted. However, the HAs don’t seem to make reference to this, but see this decision as more of a stopgap year, a time of self-discovery to make-up their mind, a time to choose a vocational pathway. Some of the HAs stated that by choosing a humanities undergraduate degree, by default they are choosing to not go down a vocational path at this stage in their lives, but instead continue learning and enjoying their subject:

HA2: *“If you’ve taken up a vocational degree, you’re more like to take up work placements. That is your mind-set. That is a consideration you’ve taken on board before your degree. It is hard to commit people who actively chosen not to go down that route that you still have to do that, we are going to put some vocational stuff in here. But I chose history, because I don’t want to, I just want to still learn”*

Instead, they are choosing their vocational path either through their work experience or through postgraduate study. As a result, this could support an argument for shaping humanities employability provision to stay outside of the curriculum, or to start at a later date.

Part 3. Engagement with employability

One of the significant findings here was the lack of student engagement with employability, in particular with work-based learning modules at level 6. The literature review illustrated that there are few placement year opportunities which are specifically targeted towards humanities students. The sandwich year opportunities are also very competitive and appeal more towards vocational degree subjects because of the way they are categorised and structured. At this post-92 university, humanities students have an optional work-based learning module offered to them at level 6 which consists of 10 weeks of work-based learning on a paid or voluntary basis. According to the findings, the take-up of this module amongst humanities students is very low.

HA1: *“We have a peculiar inability... so far to get students to do our work placement level 6 module. We’ve never taught it because we’ve never had a student do it.”*

The findings also suggested that there’s a perception amongst some HAs that the quality of the work students undertake during placements, is not of a good standard. It also highlighted that staff engagement with employability varied depending on what stage of career the lecturer was in, and how much time and resource they have allocated to it. This could lead to some disparity and inconsistency across departments:

HA1: *“We ended up sending him to HR ... he stapled memos and photocopied for four months, or whatever, something ridiculous.”*

HA1: *“We have... a lot of mature members of staff who are close to retirement and who are just trying to cling on to what they do between now and their retirement... I’m looking forward to getting some of these new lecturers in who are on the job market, you can see are doing all this already on their CVs, to make themselves marketable, and who can help us go for the employability stuff”*

HA4: *“I see an opportunity provided, it can’t be done without getting the time to do it. But I mean more than that. Showing, I put my money where my mouth is so to speak. If the dean wants that, provide 48 hours like any regular module. Because it’s that important.”*

The findings suggested that one reason for the low uptake of placements was due to the fact that students fear it as it’s not familiar to them; it’s not within the classroom and therefore not what they’re used to. This is a potential argument for creating meaningful work-based learning which does feature within the curriculum.

HA1: *“I think the big thing is, I think they’re afraid of it because it’s not classroom based, it’s not what they’re used to, it’s very unlike school.”*

Another argument for low engagement is the fact that UK tuition fees are now higher, there is less maintenance support available, so more students are potentially having to take-up part-time jobs during their degree and therefore they might not have the time to fit anything in that is not a compulsory or an assessed part of the course:

HA3: *“The problem with them working is they don’t have time to do all of the creative things, the sports things, all the stuff that was helpful in getting my first academic post for example”*

HA1: *“So it’s, if they don’t get a grade for it, it’s very difficult to get the, interested in doing it”*

The ‘Employability in the Humanities Curriculum’ report highlighted that some humanities graduates would have liked more placement support from the careers service (Lugea et al., 2015). The report also stated that universities wished to build on their employer and community links to create more placement opportunities (HEA, 2015) Hawkins and Woolf argued for the value of undergraduate placement modules in the curriculum, which is being delivered at some UK HEI’s (Hawkins and Woolf, 2018)

What we can take from these findings is that with the increase in fees and in today’s economic climate, more of our students will be working alongside their degrees than ever before. Engagement within optional activities will continue to be low unless it specifically links to an assessment or grade. If lecturers are not seeing the worth or value of something, are they going to promote and encourage students to take it up? I believe that there needs to be a stronger collaboration between course leaders, careers departments and placement teams. The literature has suggested that students would like to undertake placements and would like more support to find and secure a placement. Therefore, this may be an argument for more compulsory work-based learning in the curriculum, rather than having it as an option. If it is compulsory, would there be more resource and support put into helping students secure the placement. More research could be conducted into how course leaders and careers services across different universities work together to create work-based learning programmes of preparation and support during placement. The danger of this, is that there may still be students who are motivated to study purely for the love of the subject, for a journey of self-discovery, and for some of these students the employability prospects of the degree simply does not interest or refer to them. These students will therefore need to be considered if all humanities subjects were to make work-based learning modules compulsory.

HA4: *“History is a subject, the subject that people take in their dotage... they’ve got a fascination”*

From my own observations, I have met many students who work full-time during a full-time degree. Some of these students work night-shifts and attend lectures in the day, they are then too tired to fit anything else in. If they are on campus, they are here to go to lectures. If they are available, they are studying in the library, or they go home or to work. This raises the question of how we might move forward from the offering of employability activities which currently sit outside the curriculum. Further research is needed on the take-up of extra-curricular employability activities which take place across most UK universities, such as

careers and employability weeks. Are students attending these events? Are they optional? Are they assessed? Are we running the right events? What is the value added and impact? Good!

Another significant finding was, that of those humanities students who do engage with employability, how early they are now starting to engage; some as early as open days are asking more questions about what their degrees will lead to:

HA1: *"They are increasingly asking at open days, what can I do besides teach?"*

HA3: *"But, now I'm noticing students are very concerned with it right from the first year"*

The research illustrates an increase in the amount of stress and anxiety students are now facing, with an academic perception that this is due to the sharp increase in tuition fees. It is forcing more students to think about their employability at an earlier stage, although proactive the concern is that that the worry and angst is adding additional pressure to students' lives:

HA3: *"When they're thinking about applying they're considering what the next step is and the next progression, and it's all down to the tuition fees because that debt is going to start affecting them from the first year that they do their course"*

HA3: *"So of course they're going to be worrying about how they're going to pay it back and whether there'll be a job for them at the end. I'm noticing that's a lot of my student's anxiety now. It's not just the weight of, I need to pass this next essay, or I need to do well on my degree. If I don't then I'm going to have a lot of debt and I'm not going to have a career to go on to. So I think that's where the added pressure comes from."*

It is positive to see more students engaging with their employability at an earlier stage. However, does more structured careers support need to be put into place for those who feel stressed and anxious over the worry of getting a good return on their financial investment? Most university careers services are available to all students to attend independently. But for these more anxious and vulnerable students, could careers services do more outreach activities with these students and their lecturers through a more targeted and accessible approach?

Part 4. Humanities academics' preferred approaches to employability

There was little literature on this topic from the point of view of humanities academics, which is one of the main questions my research sought to answer. The findings highlight various activities and initiatives which seemed to work well for the HAs and how these could be developed; some of these included building on successful course rep programmes, more peer to peer activities across the levels within the degree programme, more employability input from successful alumni, increase engagement on work-based learning modules and better accessibility for students to utilise the campus facilities to develop and create their own employability opportunities.

One of the significant findings was of the value added within the humanities academics' personal tutor conversations around the topic of employability, and how this can vary depending on the student and how much they engage with their personal tutors:

HA3: *"But I find I'm also having quite a lot of discussions with my third-year students as well, especially dissertation students, because you get more of a personal relationship with them, I suppose, about their career options, what they are doing."*

HA3: *"Often if I have a student who is very stressed out with their work, and come for extra tuition, then I'll be asking where are you aiming to get with this degree. Likewise, if I have students who are quite very disengaged, I often try and have that conversation too because a lot of that tends to happen, either their part-time job is taking over a bit, or they're not entirely sure what they want to do with it either."*

HA4: *"I teach the two modules where we have got silver employability... it's through personal tutor relationships where those work. Students approach you individually and we tell them about... well, we encourage them to look in places where they want to look, and through the volunteering programme also. To encourage them to realise that it's any career"*.

Could we use these examples of successful practice being demonstrated in an informal way to build on employability provision and engagement? Improving student engagement with their personal tutors is a different area of research. However, could the careers service take advantage of this scheduled time, and of these successful relationships to add additional value. We could share more resources with humanities academics when they are having these careers conversations. Careers professionals could offer to attend some personal tutor meetings to provide a more holistic approach alongside the lecturer, regarding employability of the course and careers guidance more generally. Could careers services offer some

training to personal tutors on careers guidance techniques for their students? I think this would be especially valuable for those more anxious students who are worried about attaining a graduate level job and paying back their fees. Could there be a more structured referral programme between personal tutors and careers professionals? This is an area I would like to research further, to understand how personal tutors and careers professionals currently work together across different universities.

Another significant finding was the desire for more cross-faculty working amongst degree programmes and employability initiatives:

HA4: “If it wasn’t so difficult, we would also set up joints across faculties, outside the faculty boundaries... *I would have linguistics. That kind of... creative writing*”

HA4: “Anything that usually takes you outside your own department, creates pressures on your co-operating with people who may be under very different pressures within their own departments... so it’s largely just administrative, mechanical hurdles, boundaries”

HA4: “Basically do your teacher training alongside. You graduate with a BA in History with a full teaching qualification, which is just oh my god. Well done.”

Joint honours degree programmes have existed for an extensive amount of time, many of which sit within the same department or faculty. One new cross-faculty joint honours programme for humanities students at this post-92 university is a four-year degree with a teaching qualification, a vocational part of the degree, in collaboration with the school of education. Many other UK universities offer something similar. In view of the findings in this study, could more be done to build on these cross-faculty joint programmes for humanities students to have more vocational options integrated into their courses? The literature review highlighted that some humanities graduates wanted more enterprise education integrated into their degree programme, from a study conducted with 29 successful entrepreneurial humanities graduates (Croucher et al., 2007). Interestingly, not one reference was made to enterprise skills or enterprise education from the four in-depth interviews I conducted with HAs. This could suggest a lack of awareness or confidence around the subject area. This could also demonstrate that HAs don’t see the relevance of enterprise education for humanities students. To improve employability, could more humanities programmes have joint partnerships with vocational or employer-led curriculums such as marketing, IT and business. If the challenges are purely administrative, as one of the HAs suggested, then surely this is a challenge that could be overcome? On a smaller scale, if this proves too difficult a challenge, then similar to the work-based learning modules, could more humanities students be offered the opportunity to undertake single vocational modules across faculties on a wider scale; such as entrepreneurship or digital marketing? This idea fits with the

literature review which celebrated the importance of more enterprise education amongst young people (Young, 2014). Could this also help bridge the gap between employment-led curriculums and non-vocational degree programmes? Could this help our humanities students to become more adaptable and employable in our current labour market? If many of our humanities students are going to need to create their own opportunities and adapt to new environments then could they follow the subject they enjoy, whilst having some vocational options embedded within their programme to develop a wider range of specialist skills, which stretches beyond a career in teaching? This is something that could be researched further, to understand what cross-faculty joint programmes other universities already offer, how these opportunities could be built upon, and if there is any scope for introducing more vocational learning opportunities for humanities undergraduates.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Implications

Conclusions

This study sought to explore graduate employability from the perspective of HAs. With the recent sharp rise in UK tuition fees and an uncertainty of what the future job market might look like as we enter the 'fourth industrial revolution' (Hancock, 2017), it is important to understand the current value and worth of completing a humanities degree. What skills does this equip students with? What employability provisions are accessible to humanities students? What graduate opportunities are available for these students and what approach to employability would HAs prefer to take and why?

Following a number of in-depth interviews with HAs and a thorough analysis of the data, significant findings were illustrated and discussed.

In relation to what HAs felt the humanities degree equipped students with, there was a shared consensus between the participants and the original literature that students developed a wide range of soft and specialist skills such as empathy, cultural awareness, research and communication. What was significant in the findings, was regarding the students' lack of self-awareness in the skills they had developed during their degree, and how these skills then translated from an educational setting to a workplace context. This was further supported with findings which illustrated the lack of awareness regarding 'options with their degree', lack of uptake of placement modules and for some students, the lack of ability to make career decisions upon completion of their undergraduate degree.

I then went on to explore the theme of both student and staff engagement with employability provisions. What was significant here was that the HAs believed an increasing number of students in recent years had started to engage with employability at an earlier stage. More students appeared concerned with what they were going to do with their degree, as early as pre-university open days. Two HAs discussed how this had caused a perceived anxiety and added pressure amongst students, on top of their usual concerns over gaining a good academic grade. In contrast, it is apparent that there are still many students who choose not to engage with employability activities. Some HAs described how the take-up of work-based learning modules were either very low or none existent. It was also discussed that HAs believed humanities students wouldn't engage with extracurricular activities unless they were graded or assessed. This then raised the question about student commitments and how more students now work alongside their degrees, possibly due to increased fees and the decrease in bursaries and maintenance support. If students don't have the time to engage

with extra-curricular employability provisions, there is a potential argument for employability and in particular, work-based learning, to be part of the humanities curriculum as a compulsory element.

Another successful employability-related initiative was the value added through personal tutor meetings, particularly with students who had started to become disengaged or who were struggling with their course. Two HAs referenced how these meetings were a good way to build rapport with humanities students and a good space to discuss career options, something that had been successful in the past.

One HA discussed the benefits and logistical challenges of creating more joint honours programmes across different faculties to provide students with more options. This is another significant finding I would like to research further. The literature review affirmed that humanities joint programmes often sit within the same faculty. The main exception being when humanities subjects are partnered with the vocational subject of teaching. Teaching as a profession was referenced heavily across each of the four in-depth interviews. This is something I had anticipated, however not to the extent documented. Most participants referenced this to be one of the few professions humanities students could do in order to 'continue doing their subject' upon completion of their degree. What was significant to me was the vast amount of employability provision displayed to support this vocation, including the option of a four-year degree which includes a teaching qualification. Whilst this is a fantastic opportunity for some students, arguably this puts other humanities students, who don't wish to teach, or who aren't aware of alternative options, at an unfair disadvantage through over promotion of one pathway. The findings did not indicate that other vocations were supported or promoted in a similar way.

Implications for further practice

Further implications for practice include helping humanities students to identify more of their skills developed through an educational setting and transferring those skills into a work-based setting, making better links and recognition between the two. If there are few direct vocations to come out of humanities, the guidance approach could focus more on the skills transition, adaptability and the ability to create their own opportunities. Enterprise education did come up in the literature but did not arise in the data findings. Is this something students want more of, are HAs afraid of this? Could this be built into the vocational programmes and/or modules that I mentioned earlier?

There is a potential implication for more collaboration between careers services and personal tutor meetings. Careers professionals could look to train academic staff with some guidance techniques, or they could provide personal tutors with resources to use as part of these interventions. Is there scope for careers professionals to attend a personal tutor meeting for the more anxious and disengaged students, providing more of a holistic and joint up approach? This is a platform where careers professionals could potentially add more value, and I would be keen to see how this partnership could be developed.

The option of having more cross-faculty collaboration in the format of joint programmes or additional vocational modules could be further developed to help bridge a gap between taking up non-vocational study, whilst learning vocational skills through an employment-led curriculum. This may also help more humanities students to both specialise their skillset and make careers decisions at an earlier stage. Both the literature and findings suggested that some humanities students take up post-graduate study to either delay the decision making process, or to specialise and develop vocational skills. Almost a quarter of humanities students take-up postgraduate study, dedicating more time to their studies and usually incurring more debt. Thus, more cross-faculty collaborations at an undergraduate level may help more humanities students to be increasingly employable and career-ready at an earlier stage.

These findings may also impact on how services can make their employability opportunities more accessible for students, and how services work with courses to further embed employability into the curriculum.

Limitations

This study was conducted with a small sample size. Although, the data gained was rich and very relevant, generalisable conclusions can be drawn from the findings. Another limitation is that this study was from the perception of HAs at one post-1992 university, and not humanities students themselves, so we can only make recommendations based on the one lens this study was based on. This study also focused on HAs who teach on English and History undergraduate programmes, and therefore won't provide us with HAs views for the entirety of humanities subjects. Another limitation to this study was the fact that the researcher is also a careers guidance professional, something that the participants were aware of. The researcher had no control over how the participants might have perceived the first-time researcher and it is difficult to anticipate whether this had an impact on how the participants chose to respond to the questions.

Further research

Further research could be undertaken to understand how other UK universities structure their personal tutor meetings, and whether university careers services work with personal tutors to support students through these interactions.

I would like to conduct further research to ascertain which universities offer compulsory work-based learning modules within a humanities degree, and the impact this had on the students' learning and on their employability. I also think it would be beneficial to conduct further research on how institutions support humanities students to find and prepare for the opportunities. How do they work with their extended careers services, do they have a dedicated placement team within the department or do the students need to source the opportunities themselves?

I would also like to do further research into cross-faculty programmes and modules that link up humanities degrees with vocational programmes or employment-led modules. For example, could a history student take-up a marketing module; or could an English undergraduate take-up an entrepreneurship module? We know vocational and non-vocational partnerships exist with the subject of humanities and teaching, however is more being done?

There are implications to undertake research around the increase in tuition fees, and how this is impacting on the students' study and wellbeing. Although, some of the future findings might go beyond the theme of careers and employability, some of the findings to this study suggested that one of the concerns was the students' apprehension over getting a good job at the end of their degree in order to repay their fees. Further research on this topic could therefore impact on university careers services and the support they provide to students.

Finally, follow-up research could be conducted with current UK humanities students around the theme of engagement with employability more generally, to understand what would make them engage more and what their preferred approach to employability would be. This study could also be conducted on a larger scale to compare HAs perspectives from a range of UK universities.

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Appendix 1:

Invitation to Participate



School of Media, Culture
and Society
Paisley Campus
Paisley
PA1 2BE
Scotland

Tel 0141 848 3788
Email mcs@uws.ac.uk

Dear

My name is Sabrina Altariva. I am one of the Careers Development Consultants at the University of Wolverhampton's Careers Centre.

I'd like to invite you to take part in my research study, as part of my MSc in Careers Development and Guidance

The title of my study is: **Humanities Academics' perspectives of graduate employability**

The aim of my dissertation is to inform practice regarding employability provision in the humanities, at undergraduate level, through exploring the perceptions of humanities academics (HAs).

The research will focus on HAs views on the following:

- Student motivations for study
- What a humanities degree equips students with?
- HAs perceptions of humanities graduate pathways and their employability
- It will also inform future careers practice, based on HAs preferred approach to employability.

All I would be seeking is a one hour meeting with you to discuss the above topic, as part of a set of semi-structured interview questions

If you are able to take part, please let me know. Your input would be highly valued.

I am hoping to conduct the interviews throughout June, at City campus.

I have attached the participation information sheet above for you to review

Thank you

Kind regards,
Sabrina Altariva

Appendix 2: Participation Information Sheet



Participant Information Sheet

Humanities Academics' perspectives of graduate employability

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding, from a humanities academic's perspective, of what motivates students to study their subject at undergraduate level, what they believe the degree equips students to do upon graduation, what is their awareness of the graduate opportunities available to their students, and finally, what do they believe is the best approach to employability for their students. The results are intended to inform future practice of careers and employability provision for humanities students.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen to take part in this study because *the focus is on humanities academics' perspectives*

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

I will provide you with an overview of the study and its purpose. I will invite you to attend a structured interview in a confidential space on campus, which will be recorded using a speech to text transcription software. The interview will last 60 minutes. Yours will be one of four interviews I will be conducting as part of the study. I will then use a thematic analysis to examine, present and interpret the data findings. I will share this with you once it is drawn up.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no disadvantages or risks to taking part in this.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

This will hopefully inform careers and employability provisions and strategy for humanities students, within higher education settings

Data Protection Privacy Notice

The data controller for this project will be University of the West of Scotland (UWS). The UWS Data Protection Office provides oversight of UWS activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at dataprotection@uws.ac.uk. UWS's Data Protection Officer is Andy Connor and he can also be contacted at dataprotection@uws.ac.uk.

Your personal data will be processed for the purposes outlined in this notice. The legal basis that would be used to process your personal data will be [the provision of your consent.] You can provide your consent for the use of your personal data in this project by completing the consent form that has been provided to you.

Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this, and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible. Or we will anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide by the 31st July 2018

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, please contact UWS in the first instance at dataprotection@uws.ac.uk. If you remain unsatisfied, you may wish to contact the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). Contact details, and details of data subject rights, are available on the ICO website at: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/data-protection-reform/overview-of-the-gdpr/individuals-rights/>

Detail any intended recipients of personal data if not explained elsewhere, and also advise if any personal data will be transferred outside the EEA, and if so to where.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results will be analysed and interpreted and become part of my dissertation write-up. This may be published.

Who has reviewed the study?

MCS Ethics Committee

Contact for further information

If you require any further information please contact:

Sabrina Altariva

University of the West of Scotland,
High Street,

Paisley,
PA1 2BE

UK

Telephone: 0141 848 3027

E-mail address: B00315579@studentmail.uws.ac.uk

Research Supervisor:

Marjorie McCrory

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Tel: 0141 848 3027

marjorie.mccrory@uws.ac.uk

Thank you for taking part in this study.

Appendix 3: Consent Form



RESEARCH INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Humanities Academics' perspectives of graduate employability

Ethics Approval Number: 4490

Investigator(s):

Researcher Email: B00315579@studentmail.uws.ac.uk

Please read the following statements and, if you agree, initial the corresponding box to confirm agreement:

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

Initials

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

Initials

I understand that my data will be treated confidentially and any publication resulting from this work will report only data that does not identify me.

Initials

I agree to having my voice/likeness digitally recorded.

Initials

I freely agree to participate in this study.

Initials

Signatures:

Name of participant (block capitals)

Name of researcher (block capitals)

SABRINA ALTARIVA

Date

Date

Signature

Signature

Appendix 4:
Interview Guide



Interview Guide

Q1-5: What do HAs think about their students at entry level and as they progress

Q6-10: How HAs feel about and would tackle employability

1. Do you believe that students have a particular career in mind when choosing their course?
2. What do you believe the students motivations are for studying this subject?
3. What do you believe this degree equips your students to do upon graduation, and in particular, offer graduate employers?
4. Do you feel that students are interested in thinking about their future career during their studies?
5. Is there support in place to help students realise their career ambitions during their studies?
6. What is your understanding of the graduate opportunities available to students of this degree discipline?
7. How and at which point are your students made aware of all the options available to them at graduation?
8. Should employability feature within the curriculum at all? Please explain your answer.
9. Employability is currently embedded as an enterprise and employability skills award at your place of work (Post-92 higher education institution). Do you think this is the best approach?
10. What careers and employability education do you believe would most benefit humanities students?

Appendix 5: UWS Ethical Consent



10/05/2018
Dear Sabrina Altariva,

Your application 4490: The Aim of my dissertation is to explore humanities academics' perspectives of what a humanities degree equips students to do upon graduation. The research will focus on HAs preferred methods of embed, submission reference 3542, has been approved, with conditions, by the Media Culture and Society SEC.

You may proceed with your study provided you meet the conditions outlined below;

Title Comment
Please
upload a
copy of the
Participant
Information
Sheet(s)

PIS needs to be updated using the GDPR paper for participants. This will be forwarded to your supervisors, in addition, your supervisor has been authorised to approve the revisions to the participant's paperwork and you do not need to resubmit.

If you wish to make any significant changes to your study you must seek the committee's approval before actioning them.

Good luck with your research.
Dr Christopher O'Donnell

Appendix 7: NVivo Codebook

Nodes (codes) (Themes and sub-themes)	Sources (Interviews)	References (Evidence)	Description
1. Motivations	3	6	Evidence of factors which influence humanities students' decision making
▪ Cultural influences	1	2	Cultural influences over career decision-making process
▪ Delay the decision-making process	1	2	Factors which encourage students to delay decision making
▪ Humanities and the subject content	4	19	The subject content as a motivation for study and career choice
▪ Open days and pre-entry	3	6	Pre-university discussions over careers and employability
▪ Parental influence	2	5	Parental influence over study and career choice
▪ Subject they succeeded in at school	3	3	Academic achievement as a motivating factor for study and career choice
2. Employability provision for undergraduate students	4	51	Evidence of employability resources, opportunities and activities ran for humanities students
3. Engagement with employability	4	21	Humanities staff and humanities student engagement with employability
▪ Career focused at an earlier stage	4	11	Students focusing on careers and employability at an earlier stage than in previous years
▪ Staff engagement with employability	4	21	How and why staff are choosing to engage or dis-engage with employability within higher education
▪ Student engagement with careers and	4	32	How and why students are choosing to engage or dis-engage with employability within higher education

Nodes (codes) (Themes and sub-themes)	Sources (Interviews)	References (Evidence)	Description
employability			
▪ Unaware of career options	4	7	Students' lack of opportunity awareness
▪ Experiential learning	3	7	Various experiential learning opportunities for students
▪ Placements	3	12	Placement modules and yearlong placement opportunities for students
4. Graduate destinations	4	26	Recent and traditional graduate destinations for humanities students that humanities lecturers are aware of
▪ Postgraduate study	2	4	Students who have continued with study upon graduation.
▪ Teaching as a career option	4	20	A career in teaching is a traditional graduate destination for humanities students
5. Employability skills	4	23	The skills that humanities graduates have developed during and alongside their degree
▪ Transferable skills	4	8	Skills which can be transferred to various careers
▪ Student self-awareness	1	2	Students' awareness of their skills-set
6. Academic preferred approach to employability	4	60	Discussion of preferred approach to employability education during university for humanities students
7. Labour market	4	15	The labour market and its influence on graduate employability for humanities students and graduates
▪ What graduate employers are seeking	3	10	Skills, experience, knowledge and qualities- What are graduate recruiters looking for from our humanities graduates?

Appendix 8: Thematic Analysis Mind-map

