

## Abstract

This chapter discusses the Graduate Project, a final-year module on the BA (Hons) History programme at Bournemouth University (UK), as an example of employability-oriented education, embedded in an undergraduate degree programme in UK higher education. The Graduate Project sees students work in small teams to design, develop and deliver a project, event, or resource for an outside organisation ('the client'). Responding to the client's brief, students manage their project, their workload, and their team, with support and supervision from the university and client, before presenting and transferring the final project output over to the client at the end of the module. As a result of the Graduate Project, students gain a wide range of employability skills and experiences beyond those normally associated with a BA history degree, all of which can be featured on their CVs, discussed at job interviews, and otherwise improve their confidence in their skills and abilities for the world of graduate employment. The chapter also suggests that the Graduate Project has further added value beyond employability education, in supporting university's efforts in public engagement, co-production, and research impact agendas. The chapter concludes the ways in which the Graduate Project model has potential wider application in employability education, with suggestions for its adaptation and implementation to other arts, humanities and social science undergraduate programmes to embed, expand and enrich undergraduate employability opportunities and experiences to support students' future careers.

## Keywords

Arts, humanities, and social sciences; graduate outcomes; community engagement; student experience; embedded employability; impact

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# Chapter #

## The Graduate Project: A Model for Embedded Employability in Arts and Humanities Undergraduate Education

Fiona Cosson and Kate Terkanian

### **Introduction: Universities and the Employability Agenda**

Ensuring that graduates are highly employable after their university studies has become increasingly important to governments, universities, employers, and the public. Whilst it is widely acknowledged a university education should not only be about job prospects, and there have been many criticisms of the ‘employability agenda’, it also remains the case that for students, job prospects after their degree are an important motivator for pursuing university education. In turn, higher education providers have a role to play in ensuring their graduates are equipped with the experiences, skills, and attributes to allow them to obtain employment in their chosen fields, and to adapt and change with the labour market in the future.

The higher education sector in England has undergone rapid and radical changes in the last twenty years (Wales and Scotland operate on different funding and tuition fee systems). Since Blair’s New Labour government introduced £1,000 tuition fees for students in England in 1998, there have been multiple increases in tuition fees for universities in England – to £3,000 in 2006, and £9,000 in 2012, and £9,250 per year per year in 2021-22 (Willetts, 2010).<sup>1</sup> The result of tuition fees and the marketisation of English higher education has been a shift in the discourse and understanding of higher education, from an investment in human and intellectual capital for the benefit of society, to instead a personal investment in one’s future job prospects and earning

potential – a ‘significant private benefit’ afforded by substantial personal debt to be repaid over a graduate’s lifetime (Johnson, 2017; Bolton, 2021).

These shifts in how and why higher education is pursued and valued, funded and delivered has had profound consequences across all aspects of higher education provision. One key consequence has been the changing relationship between universities, students, and the labour market. With claims like graduates earn £500,000 more than non-graduates over their lifetimes, the link between university education, ‘value’, and financial success has been progressively cemented in public discourse (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2016).<sup>2</sup> With students required to financially invest in their education, with the promise of better jobs and higher wages than their non-university educated peers, the result is that students increasingly perceive their learning as an investment in their employability ‘that will give them direct benefits in the labour market’ (Tomlinson, 2008: 49).

Like many terms in the higher education sector (‘widening participation’, ‘student experience’) the term ‘employability’ is widely used but lacks clear definition, and might be seen by some as yet another ‘buzzword’ (Philpott, 1999; Baker, 2011). Early scholarship on employability (Hillage and Pollard, 1998) understood it as simply gaining and retaining work after graduation, and thus little different from ‘employment’. Since then, some definitions (Walker and Zhu, 2013) have sought to emphasise individual endeavour and ability, such ‘the propensity of the individual student to get employment’. Elsewhere (Cole and Tibby, 2013), there is an emphasis that employability is not only about securing employment but also about ‘adaptability’, ‘life-long learning’ and ‘success’.

Whatever its definition, universities are more concerned than ever about their graduates' potential to obtain work after they leave university. Indeed, a key indicator, used in most UK university league tables is graduate destination after leaving university (Higher Education Statistics Agency, c. 2021). At the same time, there has been attention to the alleged deficiencies in the skills and experiences of newly-graduated students, and universities are accused of not doing enough to equip their students with skills needed in graduate employment or by graduate recruiters (Saunders and Zuzel, 2010: 1-15; Wright, 2015; Steed 2018). According to a Universities UK report (2015), employers say that university and college leavers lack a mix of job-specific and general employability-related skills, as well as a lack of work experience.

One of the poorest relations in this debate are perhaps the students and graduates of programmes in the arts, humanities, and social sciences — whose courses are regularly lampooned by government (Williamson, 2021) and the press as 'dead-end' and low value.<sup>3</sup> Correspondingly, Donald et. al.'s research (2019: 610) noted a tendency for humanities students to view themselves less employable than graduates with clearer career paths, and that these distinctions had a gendered dimension as female students viewed themselves a less employable than male ones (609-12). Those who teach undergraduates in arts, humanities, and social sciences know the abundance of transferable knowledge and skills that are acquired by the study of these disciplines — critical thinking; research, selection, and interpretation; argument, persuasion, and communication. But these are not always apparent to students and employers alike. Furthermore, students in these fields do not always have the opportunity to *apply* their subject knowledge, get *experience* of professional work settings, or transferable skills in ways that they are later able to *articulate* and *evidence* to employers.

Pressure on universities to prepare their students for the labour market, has resulted in a number of approaches and initiatives to boost graduate employability. In the UK, this has seen employability become central to some university degree programmes themselves, evident for example, in the rise of vocation-orientated degree programmes such as journalism, marketing, and hospitality. Here the curricula itself supports students in pursuing clear paths of employment and career development. Universities also increasingly engage with the professional, statutory, and regulatory bodies (Higher Education Better Regulation Group, 2011) for programme accreditation, which can help students access or fast-track into a route to qualified, chartered, or professional status.

Elsewhere, employability activity has expanded from the peripheries of university education services, such as careers services and job fairs, to include increasingly sophisticated personal and career development programmes, events, and activities. Many UK universities now offer opportunities to their students including work placements, either as summer activities, embedded in their modules, or as a ‘sandwich’ placement year, extending their undergraduate course by a year. Elsewhere, employability development has been offered to students through ‘Careers with’ modules, which focus on the discipline-specific career options (Scott et. al., 2019). Additionally, there has been an increase in universities working with regional and national organisations to engage students on research and project briefs. Employability passports are also widely used in UK, North American and Australian universities as a means of recording and evidencing students’ work-related skills and experiences. Finally, students are also further encouraged to consider how the experience and skills they may gain from volunteering, involvement with student clubs and societies, and paid employment also contribute to their employability.

One of these methods of developing employability is project-based learning (PBL) which teaches skills through group projects executed within modules. PBL can provide more intensive experiences for students than extra-curricular or short-duration activities (Thune and Storen, 2015). By pairing student groups with community organisations or industrial partners to teach specific skills or provide industry experience, different disciplines across the globe have embraced PBL to enhance understanding and ultimately employability. In Brazil (Arentes do Amarala and Motohashi Matsusaki, 2017), MBA students learn project management by working directly with community organisations. In South Africa (Davidson, 2020), employability for engineering post-graduate students is bolstered through research collaboration with industry partners. In Botswana (Moalosi et. al., 2012), students work with local companies on packaging design projects. In the US (Hall, 2018), humanities students explore communication, investigation and disability studies through 3D printing technologies. These initiatives highlight the benefits of working on live, in-depth projects, but this type of learning is offered more often to post-graduate students or in disciplines where practice periods and projects are the norm – engineering, social sciences, medical degrees, business and education.

Thune and Storen (2015) note that humanities degrees are much less likely to integrate practical elements into their curriculum, but that these same students dramatically increase their employability when participating in project-based learning. Their 2015 Norway-based study indicated that post-study employment difficulties for humanities masters' students was cut in half when they had participated in project work or practice periods (712-16). Thune and Storen further suggest (2015: 718) that short-term interactions such as site visits and extra-curricular activities are less effective than these longer-term interactions.

Integrating employability into the curriculum gives students space to reflect on their learning and see the value of their education beyond the classroom. Simon Barrie (2006: 224-30) proposes that enabling students to understand and express core graduate attributes are essential elements in developing employability in higher education, and that there are four ways of conceptualising how employability can be incorporated into university curriculum. Precursor skills assume students arrive with abilities that they can apply on their own. Complement skills are bolted on top of subject-based curriculum; these are the types of attributes that are developed through career services, workshops, and employability passport schemes. Transform and enable models marry discipline-specific skills with desired graduate attributes. For humanities students, this would be understanding that the analytical and writing skills learned through subject study are valuable tools (transform), as well as comprehending how these skills can be applied in other disciplines or workplaces (enable). Hall's 3D printing project (2018) is an excellent example of enabling as humanities students used their communicative and investigative abilities to design a prosthetic limb for an outside client.

It is against this backdrop then, that the Bournemouth University's BA History programme developed the Graduate Project. Students *transform* the skills they have developed over the course of their degree by applying them in a live project. As a result, their ability to see the myriad of applications of history-specific skills beyond both the discipline and academia is *enabled*. They are able then to experience, articulate and evidence their transferable and employability skills. The chapter now discusses the Graduate Project at Bournemouth University as an example of embedded employability undergraduate education, and then suggests how the Graduate Project model has potential wider application in employability education for arts, humanities and social science programmes.

## The Graduate Project at Bournemouth University

The Graduate Project is a final-year core module on the BA (Hons) History programme at Bournemouth University (UK). The module can stretch across the whole academic year or be confined to a single semester. Working in small teams of three to four, students design, develop and deliver a project, event, or resource for an outside organisation, 'the client'. Clients provide a project brief which the students use as a base to interpret and develop an achievable output. The students then manage their project, their competing workload, and their team, with support and supervision from their lecturers and their client, before presenting and transferring the final project output over to the client at the end of the module.

From its inception in 2015, the BA (Hons) History programme at Bournemouth University has incorporated practical elements into its curriculum. Mandatory summer placements and group work at all year levels are typical. Students are also encouraged to take part in an optional 'sandwich' placement, a year-long, career-orientated stint with a degree-related employer. Students learn how history is practised both inside and outside of academia and are encouraged from their first year to envision how they can put a history degree to work once they have finished their studies.

The first time the Graduate Project module ran was in the 2017-2018 academic year, in the third year of the degree programme. The initial clients were local to Dorset and included the regional archive, a county museum, a heritage site, a literary festival and a primary school. In advance of the module launch, lecturers started to build up relations with arts, cultural, community and heritage organisations in the Bournemouth region as there were no pre-existing relationships. Subsequent recruitment has been aided by referral from previous clients, repeat clients, and Bournemouth University Community Liaison Officers. Local institutions and organisations have been eager to establish



relationships with the university, and increasingly organisations such as heritage organisations and the local council has asked for assistance in carrying out funded projects. The Graduate Project is an excellent tool to boost community engagement, and repeat clients indicate that the projects are beneficial to the community groups as well as the students.

Certain aspects of the Graduate Project, such as the module goals, expected outcomes and academic weight, were predetermined, but specifics of the module were intentionally brief, a ‘shell’ to be filled and developed. The flexibility of the module design has allowed the lecturers to adapt and shape the module year-to-year depending on the needs of the projects. In addition to fulfilling the requirement of the UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2014b) to train history students to communicate history to the public, the Graduate Project also explicitly focusses on developing employability-related skills and experiences with final-year students by helping students to:

- identify their strengths, interests and skills and put them to use
- further develop skills and attributes about which they may be less confident or experienced
- showcase their skills and experience to future places of work or study
- stand out from the crowd in having not only gained knowledge and skills during their degree, but also to have applied them to real-world clients and projects

Students are encouraged and supported to develop a range of professional skills and experiences including project management, presentations and pitches, curation and exhibition, educational resources, events-programming, archival research, writing and publishing – valuable transferable skills for future aspirations and careers. Other aspects

enable and support the development of skills and attributes commonly required in graduate-level employment, including performing effectively both independently and in group work; confidence in communicating and networking; allocating and evaluating time, tasks and resources, and planning. The end goal is to provide history students with a greater understanding of the ways historical skills can be utilized in the workplace, thus avoiding leaving students to discover these possible paths on their own after graduation.

The module represents a progression of the history degree learning goals and enables students to apply the historical skills and knowledge that they have gained over their years as history undergraduates. In order to scaffold both the confidence and the skills needed to work with outside organisations, students learn historical skills and are introduced to public history concepts and small-group projects in the first year of study. In the second year, the students conduct oral history interviews and then develop an outward-facing group project built on the interviews. By the time students reach their third and final year, they are equipped to undertake original historical research with the aim of communicating this research and information to public audiences, with an awareness of the many ways in which history can be interpreted and communicated to the public. This aligns with the UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (2014a) descriptions and history degree benchmarks regarding communicating information, ideas, problems and solutions to specialist and public audiences.

Whilst the delivery and assessment have been tweaked over the years, the essential elements – groups of three to four students working with an outside client to produce a history-related output – have remained the same. What has been most striking about the module is the students' creativity and adaptability in the face of daunting topics and

circumstances. From the first cohort, the lecturers have seen both high-performing students excel, and under-performing students blossom, and witnessed the production of excellent pieces of public history.

## Module Delivery and Structure

Three elements are central to the student experience and the development of skills. The first is the provision of masterclass workshops tailored to fit the range of projects on any given year. Second, project supervision to offer guidance and intercede with client issues is also essential. The third aspect is the module assessments which are geared towards tracking group progress, instilling time-management and project-management skills, and the production of tangible material and skills that assist in post-graduation job searches. These summative elements are also supplemented by formative engagement activities. Students and clients participate in an initial meet-the-client session at the start of the module, arrange site visits with the clients where appropriate, and participate in an end-of-module project showcase.

## Masterclass Workshops

In the main, student progress on their projects is self-directed, supported by supervision with lecturers and by masterclasses. Masterclasses are workshops that assist students with the execution of the projects and develop employability skills. These sessions vary from year-to-year, but typically include sessions on project and time management, pitching a project, exhibition design, networking, CVs, cover letters and interview preparation, and audio/visual production techniques.

Whilst the module lecturers conduct some of these sessions, the workshop format enables other Bournemouth University staff, outside professionals, including clients, and former students to share their expertise and knowledge. For example, in the

masterclass on networking, Bournemouth University's Community Engagement Officer provides links with other individuals and community groups and offers concrete ways in which the students can promote their projects to the wider community. Elsewhere, Bournemouth University experts in audio and video production get the students to think creatively about their outputs and connect them with media production students who provide technical assistance to the groups. Repeat client, the Museum of East Dorset, conducts a hands-on workshop in display design and label composition (Figure 1). A former student who is now a small business owner offers his expertise in running social media campaigns.

As the masterclass format is flexible, specialist guest lecturers can be incorporated as needed. One year, an expert on crowd-sourcing and online archive platforms was brought in when clients wanted to develop electronic archives. The masterclass format provides maximum flexibility for designing the course and ensuring the students receive appropriate skills, broadening their knowledge base. The inclusion of people active in the sector also widens the students' professional network and increases their confidence. Students are empowered by directly exploring their employability through the inclusion job-seeking sessions and contact with outside professionals.



Figure One: Exhibition Design Masterclass

## Supervision

The module aims to instil strong group-work relationships and to bolster individual confidence, and the students are consequently given charge of client relationships. However, each project team is also assigned a supervisor. Supervision is not intended to actively mediate the relationship between the student groups and the clients, but to act as a monitor should relationships or communication breakdown. The second function of supervision is to track progress and inspire the students. Supervisors suggest ways in which the teams can improve or expand on their intended outcomes. Supervision is a vital part of the Graduate Project and is conducted at regular intervals. Whilst there are no assessment points tied to this aspect of the module, some of the assignments detailed below feed into the supervision process.

## Assessment

Whilst research (Gammie and Matson, 2007: 186-99) has shown that group work is a way to prepare students for working environments, many students fear group work and anxieties around group work are linked to inequities in performance. In order to mitigate this perception, the module is assessed on an individual level and a group level (Table 1). A peer assessment element also allows the students to evaluate group members to offset worries about unequal effort. The clients have no direct role in assessment, but students often seek feedback from their client. The successful completion of the project is the end goal, but the milestones along the way are equally important. Setbacks and changes in direction are all part of the process and students are counselled on these inevitabilities. The stress is placed on the learning aspects of group work and how this mirrors experiences that they will encounter in the workplace. Former students have reported (Anonymous respondents, 2021, personal communication) that they have been able to use their successes and challenges in Graduate Project to obtain employment and in day-to-day practice.

Assessment		Weight	Group / Individual
Client Project Pitch		10%	Group
Project Progress Log		10%	Individual
Project Portfolio made up of:	(a) Project Output	40%	Group
	(b) Project Report	25%	Individual
	(c) Cover Letter & CV	10%	Individual
	(d) Peer Assessment	5%	Individual

Table One: Assessments and Weightings for the Graduate Project Module

There are four sub-elements for the individual assessment – **project progress reports**, a **CV and cover letter**, a **project report** and a **peer evaluation**. Together they

comprise 50% of the module mark. The project progress reports (10% of the module mark) take the form of a survey/questionnaire and there are four submission points during the semester. These are used during supervision to monitor progress and to allow the students the space to discretely disclose conflicts or concerns. It also serves as a diary and can help with the completion of the final project report. The CV and cover letter (10% of the module mark) are directly linked with employability. Students are expected to highlight skills gained from both the module and their degree in their CVs and cover letters, encouraging them to directly consider what they have learned at university and how their experiences relate to future employment. Some students have used live job advertisements to complete this element and subsequently secured employment, taking the first steps on their intended career path.

The final two individual elements are the **project report** and the **peer evaluation**. The project report (25% of the module mark) encourages the students to both evaluate the project and reflect on the learning process. Bournemouth University history students are exposed to report writing in both their first and second years of study. Therefore, the format of a report is familiar. They are encouraged to use reflective cycles and evaluation techniques typical for project reporting. The format also allows them to consider the learning process and, like the CV and cover letter, think about how the degree has improved their employability. The peer evaluation (5% of the module mark) allows the team members to rate the performance of the other members and offer constructive feedback. This information is collected through an online survey, and lecturers reserve the right to exclude unnecessarily punitive reviews. Research indicates (Gammie and Matson, 2007: 189, 196; Lejk and Wyvill, 2001a: 61-70, 2001b: 552-9; Onyia and Allen, 2012: 1-20) that a barrier to successful peer evaluation can be low response rates, but when handled properly peer evaluation can be effective tool.

Bournemouth University history students face no penalty for non-participation in the peer evaluation process, and yet nearly all students have taken part in this aspect of the assessment.

There are two group assessments for the module – a **project pitch** and the **final project output**, which constitute 50% of the module mark. The **project pitch** (10% of the module mark) is weighted significantly lower than the final project output and is the first opportunity for student to demonstrate their understanding of their client needs. Students create an oral presentation and pitch the project to the lecturers. The pitch relays the students' comprehension of the brief, their determination of what is achievable in the time frame, and indicates that wider sector research has been conducted. After presenting to the lecturers, the students then pitch the project to the clients in a separate session.

The **project output** is the major piece of work for the project, constituting 40% of the module mark. Each project has its own parameters and as such is judged on its merits. The emphasis is on determining whether the groups have achieved the objectives set by the client, if they have created a successful piece of public history, and if they have used their research and writing skills to achieve these objectives. BA (Hons) History students have created websites, eBooks, pamphlets, walking tours and exhibitions, and have also held community events, conducted oral history interviews and hosted public forums. Please see the 'Additional Resources' at the end of this chapter for publicly available examples.



## Student Experience and Graduate Outcomes

Given the flexibility of a history degree, the graduate destinations for Bournemouth University's history students are varied. Some have pursued higher education, become teachers, account executives, trainee accountants, recruitment consultants, and started their own businesses. What many of the graduates have in common is their assessment of the benefits the Graduate Project in their professional lives. In a survey, graduates were asked how they have used the skills learned both in applying for positions and on-the-job. Many of the responses indicated that their CVs feature their client relationships and project development, and that the module served as a useful example during interviews. One former student who is now a secondary school teacher stated (Anonymous respondent, 2021, personal communication) that 'the graduate project was a centre of conversation in all my job interviews that I attended. All employers were really impressed at the experience it had given me and it allowed me to stand out from other applicants'.

These student expressions echo what Barton et. al. (2019: 453-63) termed 'that extra sparkle' – soft skills that make graduates more attractive candidates. There are some differences in between the Graduate Project as a core module and the volunteering activities described by Barton et. al. (2019: 455-62), but the added benefit to student employability of experience with outside organisations is strikingly similar. The link between successful job searches and experiential learning, or soft skills, acquired through voluntary work experience resonates with the Graduate Project outcomes. The Graduate Project has the added benefit of embedding the development of soft skills within the degree. Developmental activities like voluntary work and involvement in extra-curricular organisations can be exclusionary. Non-traditional students whose community, family and work commitments make voluntary work and involvement in

student clubs difficult or unattractive are subsequently disadvantaged in acquiring skills that help attain post-university employment (Hordósy and Clark, 2018: 414-35). By allowing all students to work with outside clients, mimicking voluntary work and civic involvement, the Graduate Project creates a more inclusive paradigm. As a former student relates (Anonymous respondent, 2021, personal communication), the module is '[s]omething that is completely opposite ... to the normal essay writing and exam sitting, I think it is key to helping students get jobs post-graduation'.

As a former polytechnical institution, Bournemouth University has retained a strong emphasis on practical skills, and the practical aspects of the module are what students have indicated have best served them on the job. Teamwork and time management were noted as the top skills that former students use day-to-day on their jobs. The survey responses also indicated that these aspects were ones the students found to be the most challenging. Two graduates who are now teachers indicated that the Graduate Project inspired them to model local history modules for their own students (Anonymous respondents, 2021, personal communication), and in one school, the whole department had adopted the graduate's work scheme and lessons. Whilst the feedback from this survey is qualitative, the responses indicate that the goals of the module have been comprehended by the students. They have been able to utilise skills learned in both applying for work, during the interview process, and on the job.

As a final testament to the efficacy of the Graduate Project in emphasising both traditional humanities skills and their practical application, this unsolicited response from a recent graduate is indicative:

the graduate project was absolutely incredible and I was blessed to be surrounded by amazing people ... I'm still in a state of shock at how well we've

done! I put that down to [the lecturers] and the brilliant masterclasses that helped inspire us along the way! We honestly felt like detectives as we sieved through information and used all tools at our disposal to understand these people, their lives, and their struggles (Anonymous, 2021, personal communication).

## Making an Impact

Beyond the employability skills and experiences that the Graduate Project provides for students that have been discussed so far, the Graduate Project model has further, added social value for universities and their communities. By facilitating the creation and development of positive relationships and partnership-working between staff, students, and the community-based external clients, the Graduate Project model can act as a driver to start, expand, or deepen a university's engagement with its communities, whilst also fulfilling sector and institutional drivers and metrics relating to public engagement, co-production, and research impact agendas (University Partnership Programme Foundation Civic University Commission, 2019).

As the UK higher education sector increasingly assumes more corporate, market-like behaviour, universities simultaneously seek to demonstrate their social value to 'engage' and 'impact' their communities and the public. Initiatives such as the UK National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement, which was founded in 2008, and the UK Civic University Network, launched in 2020 and backed by the University Partnership Programme Foundation and has more than fifty UK university members, indicates a growing appetite within the higher education sector for public and community engagement. These engagements and relationships are also increasingly being measured by the sector assessments and metrics; since 2014, the UK Research Excellence Framework has sought to assess the benefits of research outside of academia through its Impact agenda, and 2021 saw the first iteration of the UK Knowledge Exchange Framework, set up to measure knowledge exchange activities between

universities and external partners for the benefit of the economy and society. As such, both institutional targets and a genuine desire to connect and include their communities and the public with their work means that universities are keener than ever on outreach and partnership work. The Graduate Project enables universities to connect with organisations in their region and beyond, allowing the development of relationships, projects, and ways of working, with the potential to progress to more formal partnerships and collaborations, through memorandums of understanding, funding bids, and contract research.

There are benefits to the clients in participating in the Graduate Project. Of course, there is input needed from the project clients into the Graduate Project; principally, this is time rather than money. As above, clients are asked to complete a project brief, attend meetings with students to help steer the project through feedback and planning, and attend a showcase of the students' work at the end of the module. In return, there can be significant payback for the clients. Enlisting students on a project can bring practical benefits in terms of extra support, activity or resources on an existing client project, helping to plug the volunteer gap, and boost projects that have lost momentum. For clients, working with a student team can also bring new insights, approaches, and ideas, such as ways to engage younger audiences, or ways to expand use of digital technologies. Elsewhere, student input to client projects sees students use their disciplinary skills, knowledge, and passion. Additionally, the structure of the Graduate Project model encourages the development of projects and of relationships with and between university staff, students and client organisations; projects can be built on year-after-year by subsequent cohorts. Finally, and more broadly, there can also be kudos for organisations to work with universities, to illustrate their reach or relevance, and to demonstrate partnership-working to funders, governors, or regulatory bodies.

## **Conclusion: The Graduate Project as a Model for Embedded Employability**

Degrees in the arts, humanities and social sciences allow their students to gain a wide range of skills and attributes, including research, interpretation, communication, flexibility, and adaptability, but this broad skillset is also one of the reasons students can struggle with the direction of their job search post-university. Emphases on employability and graduate outcomes concentrate on high-paying technology-related degrees. However, Adam J Smith (2018, 1037-44) posits that Humanities graduates, whose education is rooted in resilience and humanity, are more prepared for a future environment that is adaptable to the economic precarity that new graduates will meet in the modern workplace. Yet, graduates from these programmes are not always able to recognise or articulate the skills they have as a result of their studies. The Graduate Project overcomes this by giving students the opportunity to apply, experience, articulate, and evidence their employability skills and experiences. The Graduate Project has potential wider application, and presents a model for employability education in arts, humanities and social science programme undergraduate curricula. to embed, expand and enrich undergraduate employability opportunities and experiences to support students' future careers.

For example, the Graduate Project model could be applied to politics undergraduates, with client projects with local government and councillors, activism and campaigning, and political media organisations. Students studying English or linguistics might work with literacy and reading charities, book and poetry festivals, and publishers. Sociology undergraduates could work with equality, policy, and youth organisations. Further, the Graduate Project model could also function at postgraduate level, allowing specialised projects, individual or group, with discipline or industry-

relevant projects embedded into a taught MA programme. In terms of location, the Graduate Project detailed here has principally worked with organisations local to the region but, given the experience of universities and organisations in remote working as a result of COVID-19, there are also possibilities for working with national and international organisations and companies as project clients. Finally, if the Graduate Project model was employed by universities at an institutional level, an administrative channel would enable companies and organisations to approach the university, and a wider range of clients and projects might be recruited and supported to take part in the Graduate Project, delivering projects for organisations and industries, and furnishing students with career capital to take forward into their graduate futures.

The skills, confidence and sense of achievement gained from completing a high-quality Graduate Project is invaluable to students who will soon be leaving university to pursue employment or further study. Working with clients gives students a taste of real-world, professional working environments, projects, and communications in a way traditional university-based learning cannot, giving them a better idea of what they are capable of and the myriad of opportunities they can follow.

## Additional Resources

Bournemouth Blind Society – eBook, audio book and interactive map  
<https://www.bournemouthblindsociety.uk/home-2/student-history-project/>

Dorchester Town Council Heritage Tourism – Dorchester Hidden Histories walking trail  
<https://geotourist.com/tours/4406>

Dorset History Centre - The Treves Trail walking trail, Dorchester  
<https://geotourist.com/tours/1908>

Golden Arrow: The Roads Less Travelled online exhibition  
<https://nationalmotormuseum.org.uk/online-exhibitions/golden-arrow-the-roads-less-travelled/>

Queen's Park Forum – Memories of Charminster walking trail  
<https://pocketsights.com/tours/tour/405-B3063-Bournemouth-BH8-9QT-UK-Memories-of-Charminster-2983>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> When introduced in 2012, the figure of £9,000 was supposed to be an ‘absolute limit’ charged only in ‘exceptional circumstances’, but in fact, almost all universities chose immediately to charge the maximum tuition fees and continue to do so, with tuition fees in 2021-22 in England at £9,250 per year.

<sup>2</sup> Johnson’s figures were later challenged, and, amongst other errors, these figures did not include the cost of student loan repayments or tax, nor take into account other aspects that shape graduate outcomes, including family background and education.

<sup>3</sup> It might be noted that Gavin Williamson studied Social Sciences at the University of Bradford from 1994 to 1997.

## Reference List

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