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The English Degree & Graduate Careers

John Brennan and Ruth Williams, with Zsuzsa Blaskó

Report Series

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A Report to the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN)
English Subject Centre

The English Degree and Graduate Careers

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Centre for Higher Education Research and Information, the Open University

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Foreword

The English Subject Centre Report Series aims to provide contextual information about the condition of the subject, its relation to national HE policies, and the practical and academic concerns shared by English Departments at the present time. Thereby, the series intends to assist departments in their planning, and in their understanding of their own positions.

This second report takes as its subject the career destinations of undergraduate students in English, a subject of increasing importance in many English Departments following the expansion of student numbers over the last decade, and the government's announcement of the target for a 50% participation rate. These expansions are predicated in part upon the belief that graduates will play a key role in the economic prosperity of the nation, most notably, by their contributions to what is commonly termed the 'knowledge economy', a designation commonly deployed (but rarely defined with any precision) which implicitly alludes to employment behaviours requiring adaptability, flexibility, and openness to change. In such an economy, the graduates of non-vocational subjects find themselves in strong competition with those trained in vocational areas, and their undergraduate experience is therefore under pressure to indicate more precisely the intelligence, strengths and aptitudes that such degrees provide, since specific skills are not announced in their titles. While some English Departments may prefer to understand their students' studies in the context of a disinterested love of learning itself, the exigencies of student finance, increased costs, and institutional policies adopted in the face of league tables ranking HEIs by their graduates' employment statistics, make this position increasingly less tenable. Increasingly too, English colleagues are expressing a felt need to speak up for the English degree as a fine, rounded education, with a graduate population whose intelligence and high-level competences need to be better profiled. That we owe this to our students, so that they subsequently might make choices about their graduate careers rather than feel limited by their choice of subject, is incontrovertible.

This report therefore surveys the field of the English degree and graduate careers in order to achieve a better understanding of the English student's current relation to the world of employment. To this end, we commissioned the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information at the Open University (CHERI), a unit with an established expertise in the

field of graduate employment to conduct the research. The Centre also felt it was important to ensure that this report avoided predicating its findings solely on first destination statistics which are collected only six months after graduation. CHERI were able to produce additional data sets, taking a longer profile extending to three to four years after graduation. While this provides a fuller picture, we also have to remember that some developments in the English degree have taken place since the CHERI data were collected in 1998/99. The report also surveys the ways in which English graduates' expectations of employment may be primed by information issued by English Departments, the English Benchmarking Statement, and the extent to which the current profiling of the English degree offers distinctive skills. In addition, it analyses English graduates' earnings and employment satisfaction in relation to graduates from other subjects, and draws on the broad field of studies of graduate employment, in relation to English.

The report notes that the long-term career prospects for English graduates are good, and are around the same level for that achieved in the comparator subjects here. Further, there is no evidence of long-term unemployment, even though English graduates tend to spend time in lower levels of employment immediately after graduation. English graduates' earnings tend, however, to be lower than those of some of their peers, although this could be accounted for by the fact that relatively high proportions of English graduates work in the public services, where lower pay, on average, prevails. Many enter teaching; a considerable number undertake further study or training immediately after their first degree, therefore further delaying, in all probability, their movement up the earnings ladder. A close reading of the report will also yield information about further improvements that could be made. Some English graduates, and employers, note an absence of skills, or simply lack of preparation in specific areas, and the profiling of students' abilities, and indeed their career prospects, could be further improved, and rendered more accurate.

The report should also be read in the context of further current activity in the field, and a comprehensive directory is provided here. At the English Subject Centre we have recently sponsored a large study undertaken at De Montfort and Loughborough Universities (involving further partners for survey work); we have also been a partner in the

study of postgraduate employment in the arts and humanities conducted by the Council of University Deans in Arts and Humanities; we have developed links with the valuable work being conducted in the Skills Plus project at Lancaster University. It is hoped that this report will take its place alongside such materials to assist English Departments in their responses to the graduate careers agenda.

The report will be widely distributed. Hard copies will be delivered to Departments, and an electronic version can be downloaded from the English Subject Centre website at www.english.ltsn.ac.uk

Professor Philip Martin
Director, English Subject Centre
Royal Holloway, University of London
December 2002

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide English departments with information about the employment prospects of their graduates and some of the ways in which these might be enhanced. It draws on existing research and statistical evidence as well as exploring some of the initiatives to improve graduate employability taken by English departments and departments in cognate fields.

1. The 'employability' agenda

The contribution of higher education to economic prosperity has been a driving force behind higher education policy in recent years. It has justified the massive expansion of student numbers and has provided the rationale for a whole series of Government supported interventions to make higher education's graduates more employable. The resultant pressures in many institutions have been to develop curricula emphasising strong employment relevance, to demonstrate the employment relevance of courses (often as a marketing ploy), to strengthen careers services and to produce 'add-ons' to the student experience such as work placements, mentoring schemes and so on.

Notwithstanding the growth in their numbers, graduates remain privileged actors in the labour market. The single most important determinant of their employment prospects is their subject of study. However, for students from non-vocational subjects (such as English), 'where you studied' and 'prior social and educational background' may be equally important determinants of employability.

Many discussions about employability fail to distinguish between factors associated with 'getting a job' and factors associated with 'doing a job'. Employability is multi-dimensional and whilst this is recognised in principle, in practice discussions are often influenced by the annual first destination statistics six months after graduation. These provide only limited information about what graduates are doing at a very early point in their post-university careers.

2. The data, statistics and projects

Two sets of data on the destinations of first degree graduates are used in this report. The first is the annual 'first destinations survey' (FDS) of full-time graduates six months after graduation. The second is a one-off international study of graduate employment in 11

countries (including the UK) three to four years after graduation. In this report the employment experiences of English graduates are compared to those of graduates in History, Biological Sciences, Sociology and Politics, and Business and Administrative Studies.

Reliance on 'first destinations' can show the employability of English graduates in a rather poor light; at six months after graduation over half of English graduates were in full-time paid employment but this was below the proportions for all but one of the comparator subjects in our study. In part, this was because over a quarter were studying for a further qualification. However, at three to four years after graduation, 84% reported being in a full-time job, a figure close to the average for all graduates.

Six months after graduation, English graduates are spread over a wide range of jobs; the same is true for graduates in the other subjects reviewed in this report. However, an English graduate appears less likely to work in a graduate level occupation than other graduates at this early stage in their careers. But at three to four years after graduation, a high proportion of English graduates can be found in 'professional' jobs. In this respect, early disadvantages have again disappeared.

However, compared with graduates in the other subjects reviewed in this report and at this later stage in their careers, English graduates appeared to be less satisfied with their jobs when compared to the job expectations they had when they entered higher education. They were also earning significantly less than other graduates.

3. The distinctive profile of the English degree

The aim of this part of the research was to explore the ways in which English degrees were being profiled in terms of the various abilities, competences and skills they represented. Three approaches were taken: i) to analyse the messages being presented on English department websites, ii) to compare the English benchmark statement with those of a number of other subject areas, and iii) to analyse English graduates' perceptions of the skills they possessed at the time of their graduation.

Of the websites visited, just over half included information on the abilities, competences and skills that successful graduates are likely to have developed while studying an English degree. Around two-thirds

offered information on the types of careers English graduates move into.

A comparison of the ‘generic/graduate’ skills mentioned in the English benchmark statement with those of seven other subject areas shows that two are specific to English: ‘planning/execution of essay/project work’ and ‘understand/develop intricate concepts’. Four are common across all subjects: ‘literacy/communications skills’, ‘team work’, ‘IT skills’, and ‘time management/organisation’. The one skill mentioned in five of the seven statements but not by English is ‘problem-solving’. Taking into account the investigation of website messages, the generic/graduate skills mentioned reflect those of the English benchmark statement, although the full range of skills is less in evidence.

In analysing English graduates perceptions of the skills they possessed at the time of graduation, the main strength was in ‘written communication skills’. This reflects messages given out on websites and included in the English benchmark statement. However, English graduates feel they are particularly weak at ‘working under pressure’, ‘time management’ and ‘fitness for work’. In comparing these perceptions with the English benchmark statement, there is a mismatch in terms of developing ‘team work’, ‘time management/organisation’ and ‘IT skills’. While the evidence presented in this report is limited, it suggests that English graduates in the past may not have developed the full range of attributes and capabilities outlined in the benchmark statement.

4. The employer view of the English degree

Employers’ views of English graduates are very difficult to investigate, not least because English graduates are spread over a broad range of employment sectors and occupations. English graduates also tend to take jobs where an English degree is not a prerequisite.

Employers therefore are unlikely to distinguish between graduates in English and graduates in other Arts and Social Science subjects. One recent study of six large graduate employers reported that employers felt that Arts and Humanities graduates could lack certain essential skills (teamwork and project work with presentation elements). The study (and many others) found that a lack of work experiences – rather than the content of the degree – could hinder graduates. Another study (CIHE, 2002) found that 26 employers felt English graduates lacked analytical competences,

pro-activity, relationship building, time management and organisational skills.

However, experts in this field (Teichler, 1998) tend to question the reliance that can be given to statements made by employers. They question whether employers’ recruitment practices are consistent with their statements and on what basis they are able to make links between skills possessed by graduates and work tasks required of them. Few employers appear to monitor systematically the career progression of graduates of different types.

5. A representative selection of the work on graduate employability currently being conducted in English departments

Our search was limited to well-known and well-established externally-funded projects. Three major projects specific to English departments were identified.

One aimed to raise ‘awareness of the employment prospects of English students and, if appropriate, suggest ways of adapting the curriculum to meet student employment needs’.

Another was a survey of graduates (including English graduates) to find out how their jobs relate to their study, how well university education prepared them for their jobs, and the relationship between the skills and knowledge acquired on leaving university and the skills and knowledge required to carry out their jobs.

The third was a continuation of a project aimed at promoting the acquisition of advanced written and oral communication skills among first year undergraduates in English through research into practice, design of teaching materials and their dissemination. The aim of this current project was to disseminate the original materials, broadcast new research and trial developing materials, including the re-launch of a consultancy service to English departments.

Few rigorous evaluations have been carried out of these types of initiatives and therefore their effectiveness is difficult to discern. As mentioned above, the employability of an English graduate is likely to be influenced by the type and status of the institution attended and the graduate’s social and cultural background. Current research suggests that issues of confidence, self-esteem and aspirations may be at least as important as skills and competences in securing good employment. (Brennan and Shah, 2002).

6. Relevant initiatives in cognate areas

In this part of the research, our search was again limited to well-known and well-established externally-funded projects. The 25 projects identified fell into a number of categories:

- Those generally aimed at enhancing graduate employability and asking questions such as what is graduate employability, how is it developed, what skills do employers want, and what impact does the development of skills have on employment prospects?
- Those focused on curriculum design and development and aimed at exploring what parts of the curriculum can help enhance graduate employment.
- Those aimed at developing institution-wide strategies for skills development.
- Those aimed in particular at the skills development of postgraduates and concerned with exploring the types of skills developed by postgraduate study and their relevance to employment.

Again, evidence for the effectiveness of such initiatives is rather limited.

7. Conclusions

Like graduates from other non-vocational courses, English graduates enter a wide range of employment areas and it may take them a few years to obtain suitable employment. However, there is no evidence of long-term unemployment among English (or other) graduates.

Indeed, on a number of dimensions, English graduates compare rather well with their peers from other disciplines. Nevertheless, the reported gap between aspirations at the time of entry to higher education and employment achievements three years after graduation may give some cause for concern.

Statements made by English departments about the career opportunities open to their graduates may not always be backed up by hard evidence. Survey data on graduate employment suggest that English graduates may go into an even wider range of job types than are envisaged in prospectuses or web-sites. But employment is likely to be in the public or voluntary sectors.

English graduates perceive a number of strengths in terms of their skills and competences, mainly related to communications. But they also reveal some weaknesses compared with other graduates.

Information on employers' views of English graduates is limited although statements of a general nature abound. The reliance to be placed on these and on the effectiveness of some of the initiatives taken in higher education to enhance graduate employability is limited by the relative lack of hard evidence.

Introduction

This is a report about graduate employment and the employment of English graduates in particular. It was commissioned by the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) English Subject Centre and aims to provide English departments with information about the employment prospects of their graduates and some of the ways in which these might be enhanced. The report draws on existing research and statistical evidence and takes account of some of the initiatives taken by English departments and departments in cognate fields to improve graduate employability.

The report is structured around six themes:

- The context of the 'employability' agenda and its place in higher education policy.
- The data, statistics and the projects that are providing up to date information in this field.
- The distinctive profile of the English degree.
- The employer view of the English degree.
- A selection of the work on graduate employability currently being conducted in English departments.
- Relevant initiatives in cognate areas, particularly those operating across institutions.

We conclude the report with some comments about the messages coming out of this research that the English Subject Centre and English departments might wish to take forward.

Section 1: The ‘employability’ agenda

For the past two decades, the contribution of higher education to economic prosperity has been a driving force behind higher education policy. It has justified the massive expansion of student numbers during the 1990s and has provided the rationale for a whole series of government supported interventions to make higher education’s graduates more employable. Most recently, the greater emphasis given by national quality assurance arrangements to learning outcomes and the planned introduction by HEFCE of institutional performance indicators on graduate employment present further signs of the importance attached to employment and employability.

There are a number of ways in which this external climate affects the inner lives of higher education institutions.

First, there is pressure in many institutions to develop curricula that emphasise strong employment relevance. This may be done through the introduction of new programmes – for example, a geography department turns its hand to producing a tourism course – or by emphasising the employment-related skills and competences that existing curricula can produce when accompanied by appropriate pedagogies – e.g. more team-work, more emphasis on presentational skills. Subject benchmarks and their associated programme specifications have supported this concentration on the generic, employment-related skills that academic programmes produce rather than, for example, on mastery of the subject or cognitive development.

Second, there is pressure on institutions and subject groups within them to demonstrate the employment relevance of their courses in order to ensure healthy student recruitment. This pressure affects some institutions more than others – depending not only on market position but also on institutional leadership and culture. This pressure may lead to nothing more than changes in the vocabularies that are used to market courses but it can also lead to modifications to curricula and can affect resource flow within institutions. One might also add that changes in the vocabularies used to describe courses can affect those courses by influencing the aspirations and the expectations of students who are recruited to them.

Third, most institutions have been strengthening their careers services and are producing various add-ons to the student experience – work placement opportunities, mentoring schemes, career development

curriculum modules, mock job interviews, help with CV drafting etc. These kinds of developments may not affect subject groups directly although the participation of students in such activities may well be influenced by the levels of support shown for them by their academic departments. They also pose large questions for the relationships between academic departments and various central student services.

As in most areas of higher education policy, the evidence base for many employability initiatives is quite thin. Notwithstanding the expansion of higher education in this country and elsewhere, it is clear that graduates remain privileged actors within the labour market. Thus, graduates

- are unlikely to experience long-term unemployment;
- are likely to earn substantially more than people with an upper secondary education;
- are likely to experience high levels of job satisfaction and responsibility in the long term;
- increasingly likely to experience a transitional period of several years between leaving higher education and entering ‘long-term’ graduate employment;
- will have different experiences in the labour market according to what and where they have studied, as well as according to a wide range of other educational and socio-biographical characteristics.

(*CHERI and HEFCE, 2000*)

Subject of study remains the single most important determinant of employment prospects. For those students who are studying a professional course linked to jobs for which there is buoyant employer demand, obtaining a job will not be a problem and future job prospects will be determined by the characteristics and health of the profession. Students from other courses face greater choices when entering the job market and may need to display characteristics to employers in excess of ‘possession of a degree in x’. These characteristics might include attendance at a ‘top’ university or possession of a whole set of cultural attributes linked to prior social and educational background. In other words, for students from non-vocational subjects, questions of what you have studied may be less important than questions of where you studied and your social background.

The choices open to English and other non-vocational graduates are potentially immense. A recent survey of graduate vacancies among ‘top’ employers in the UK indicated that 60% of jobs were open to graduates irrespective of the subject of their degrees (CSU, 2002). This supports earlier findings and interpretations. For example, Harvey et al (1997) note that, ‘a major reason for employing graduates is to get bright, intelligent recruits. For many employers, intellect is more important than degree subject knowledge’.

Others have noted that ‘bright intelligent recruits’ might in fact be identified by their “social fit” in terms of outlook, interests, connections, style, dress, speech, which provide for a smooth transition into the organisation’s way of doing things’ (Brown and Scase, 1994).

For students in English – along with students in subjects such as history, physics, chemistry and biology – the content of studies may be less important to their employment prospects than a range of social and cultural attributes brought with them into higher education. In other words, the extent of the challenge facing English departments wishing to ensure good employment prospects for their students varies considerably according to the social mix of the students and the prestige of the host university.

One final point to be made in this section concerns what we mean by the term ‘employability’. A study commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) defined employability as follows:

‘Employability is the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment. For the individual, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess, the way they use those assets and present them to employers and the context (e.g. personal circumstances and labour market environment) within which they work’ (Hillage and Pollard, 1998).

But the individual’s employability will crucially be influenced by how employers view the knowledge, skills and attitudes he or she possesses. If employers do not value these attributes or do not know how to use them, the individual’s employability will remain low however much education and training s/he acquires.

Discussions of employability frequently fail to distinguish between factors associated with ‘getting a job’

and factors associated with ‘doing a job’. Within higher education, supports from careers services are likely to be concerned primarily with the former while course experiences are going to be more relevant to the latter.

One of the problems with much of the debates about graduate employment is that although the multi-dimensionality of ‘employability’ might be recognised in principle, in practice discussion is influenced by the annual ‘first destinations’ statistics. These provide a snapshot of what graduates are doing six months after graduation. The limitations of these statistics are discussed in the next section. But the point to emphasise here is that there is very little graduate unemployment in the long-term – destinations three years after graduation show a very different picture from first destinations. However, there remain questions about the appropriateness of the jobs some graduates obtain and about the adequacy of their preparation for work as seen from the employers’ perspective. These issues have been much debated in the literature – see, for example, Belfield et al, 1997, Elias et al, 1999, CHERI and HEFCE 2000, Brennan et al, 2001. We find in general that significant minorities of graduates experience difficulties in obtaining ‘suitable’ jobs, feel dissatisfied with the jobs they do obtain and find little of relevance from their higher education to performing these jobs. These graduates are minorities and many will find that early difficulties will be replaced by later success in employment. Most at risk are students studying non-vocational subjects at less prestigious institutions and lacking desirable social and cultural assets.

There are some clear implications from the above for English departments. These might be summarised as follows:

1. National and institutional policies on higher education continue to place emphasis on employment outcomes.
2. For English students more than many, the prestige of the institution they have attended and the attributes they possess as a result of their social and cultural background may be particularly important in determining employment outcomes.
3. Discussion of graduate employment solely based on first destination statistics is likely to show English (and certain other subjects) in a relatively poor light.

Section 2: Data, statistics and projects

1. Information on graduate careers: an introduction

The First Destinations Survey (FDS) collected by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) – through returns supplied by HEI careers services – is the only regular annual survey that aims to cover all graduates from all higher education institutions in the UK. However, its coverage is currently limited to full-time programmes (including first degrees, postgraduate degrees, and ‘other undergraduate’ courses – certificates/diplomas of higher education and higher national certificates/diplomas). Former students are surveyed six months after graduation. The survey achieves a response rate of around 80%. The size of the survey means that accurate information can be gained about relatively small sub-groups – such as graduates in one particular subject, e.g. English.

Information collected in the survey includes:

- the graduates’ activity at the time of the survey;
- location of the main activity; type (paid/unpaid) and mode (part-time/full-time) of employment;
- occupational classification of the employment;
- industrial sector;
- nature and subject of the study (for those studying);
- reason for not being available for employment.

These data are linked to the educational background of the graduates, such as their higher education institution, field of study, type and class of degree etc. Selected statistics, including extensive data by subject of study, are available from HESA’s yearly publications (HESA, 2002) and from the HESA website (www.hesa.ac.uk).

Interpreting HESA FDS data

Whilst the FDS achieves an excellent response rate and a good coverage of subjects, it has certain limitations that are important to bear in mind. Some of these are as follows:

- Transition into a stable employment position typically takes two or three years with various temporary activities (such as travelling; periods of temporary and part-time jobs; short-term unemployment and further studies) in the meantime. Therefore, the cross-sectional view six months after graduation often shows an interim situation only.

- This transition period can be especially discontinuous for graduates in subjects with loose links to employment.
- In the case of graduates with non-vocational qualifications, the frequency of further study means that the FDS reflects the employment experiences of a relatively small sub-group of graduates. (In 2000/2001, 28% of English first degree graduates were engaged in further studies whereas the respective figure for the total graduate body was only 18%.)
- The range of information the FDS includes about the graduates’ employment situation is restricted. ‘Employability’ or ‘success in the labour market’ can only be assessed through a small number of indicators, such as lack of unemployment or the type of employment as measured by a few objective criteria. The important issues of income differences and graduates’ perceptions about their employment remain unexplored in this survey. This is especially problematic considering that graduate unemployment is relatively rare and therefore its occurrence does not provide a useful measure of differences in graduates’ employability.

Some evidence suggests that in certain respects the situation of graduates as shown in the FDS is indicative of their later employment prospects. The ‘Moving On’ study (Elias et al, 1999) shows, for example, that being unemployed six months after first degree studies is indicative of certain types of longer-term labour market difficulties. With all its limitations, the FDS is the only regular, comprehensive, national survey of graduates’ employment in the UK.

Other information on graduate careers

In addition to the FDS, there have been several smaller-scale national surveys conducted among various cohorts of graduates in the UK. Advantages of such studies are that they are usually carried out a longer time after graduation and collect a broader range of information than the FDS.

Without exception, however, these were surveys of samples with usually no more than a few thousands respondees. If the various subjects are proportionally represented in such surveys, the number of graduates with an English degree will often be too small to allow safe generalisations.

It is not surprising therefore that studies based on such surveys do not usually provide information on individual subjects but on broad groups of subjects only (such as ‘Natural Sciences’; ‘Social Sciences’, ‘Humanities’). Insofar as the subjects represented in these broad groupings share certain characteristics, the results from such studies can still provide useful information for those interested in a particular subject. (A list of selected publications associated with these types of surveys is provided in Appendix 6.)

The next section provides an analysis of the latest data from the FDS survey and the main messages emerging from it for English. This is followed by the findings from a UK survey of graduates that was part of an international study of graduate employment in 11 countries.

2. The First Destinations Survey and English graduates

The following paragraphs present an analysis of the 2000/2001 findings of the FDS in relation to students with a first degree in English (HESA, 2002)¹. Comparisons are made with a range of other subjects: History, Biological Sciences, Sociology and Politics, and Business and Administrative Studies². With the exception of Business and Administrative Studies, these subjects share many of the labour market features of English – no close links with particular employment fields, diverse labour market outcomes, based on academic disciplines rather than thematic or professional concerns. Business and Administrative Studies is the exception; although a vocational field, it does not have close links to specialist professional areas. When graduates from these subjects enter the labour market, they may well be competing for similar jobs. The tables referred to in the text can be found in Appendix 1.

The latest FDS shows that six months after completing their first degrees, 58% of English graduates were in employment, 28% were still studying and only just over 7% were actually without work and were seeking it (see Figure 1).

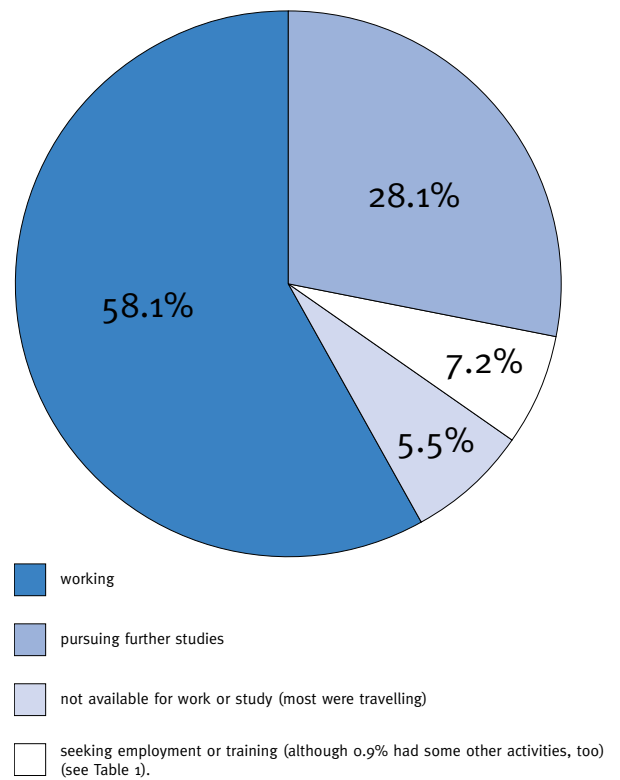


Figure 1: Destinations of English graduates

This overall picture of English graduates is similar to that of other non-vocational degree graduates, although there are certain differences between subjects in the proportions continuing their studies (see Table 1 in Appendix 1). However, the proportions unemployed are broadly similar (varying between 6.9% and 9%) in all these groups and English graduates are no exception³.

What jobs do English graduates do?

The job a graduate might hold six months after completing his or her studies is very often one that the graduate would not consider as permanent, or one that is a ‘real’ first destination. At the time of the survey only 75.1% of all employed English graduates were working in a full-time paid position – a figure that is below the average (82.4%) and is below the subjects used for comparison (see Figure 2).

¹ In 2000/2001, the 5,600 English graduates represented 3% of the total population of the 176,415 first degree graduates who appeared in the HESA FDS survey.

² Where a graduate has studied a combination of two subjects with a major/minor split, the programme is allocated to the major part of the study. If the combination is an equal split and lies within more than one of the broad subject areas used by HESA, the programme is allocated to the ‘combined’ area.

³ This category includes two sub-groups: ‘unemployed’ and ‘other activity’.

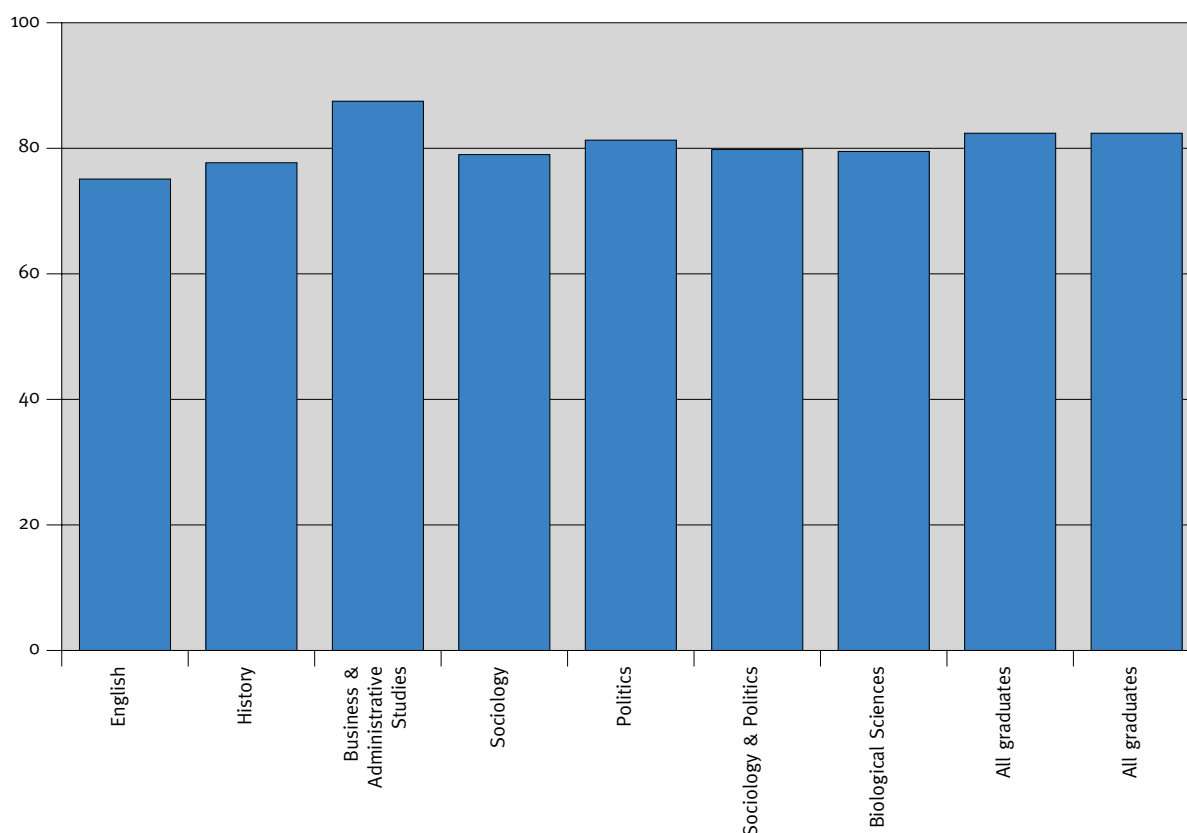


Figure 2: Paid full-time employment by subject (as a proportion of those in employment) (%)

Out of the 17 industrial sectors defined by the Standard Industrial Classification, employed English graduates are spread over a wide range of sectors (see Table 3 in Appendix 1). In comparison with other graduates, there is a similar level of concentration in certain sectors: 56% of English graduates find a job in one of four sectors compared to 61% of History, 65% of Business and Administrative Studies, 59% of Politics and Sociology and 54% of Biological Sciences graduates. The main sectors for English graduates are business, consultancy and research (18%), wholesale and retail trade (16.4%), manufacturing (11%), community, social and personal services (10.2%), education (10.2%). However, the nature of the jobs obtained in these sectors cannot be deduced from these figures. And it must be remembered that this is only six months after graduation when over 40% of English graduates are not yet in employment.

Type of job

There is no easy way to judge whether a certain job requires a degree level qualification or not. Among the various approaches, one possibility is to use the Standard Occupational Classification as a (fairly rough) indicator. Based on this grouping, managers and administrators, professionals and those working in associate professional and technical occupations⁴ are frequently considered graduate level jobs. According to this criterion, six months after graduation an English graduate in employment is less likely to work in a graduate occupation (41.1%) than other graduates (65.1%) – see Table 4 in Appendix 1 and Figure 3 below. However, when compared with other non-vocational degrees, we find that a first degree in English provides no worse opportunities than one in History (42.6% in the graduate level jobs), although our other comparator subjects do better whilst still being below the average for all subjects.

⁴ That is: Scientific Technicians; Draughts Persons, Quantity and Other Surveyors; Computer Analyst/Programmers; Ship and Aircraft Officers, Air Traffic Planners and Controllers; Health Associate Professionals; Legal Associate Professionals; Business and Financial Associate Professionals; Social Welfare Associate Professionals; Literary, Artistic and Sports Professionals; Associate Professionals and Technical Occupations not elsewhere classified.

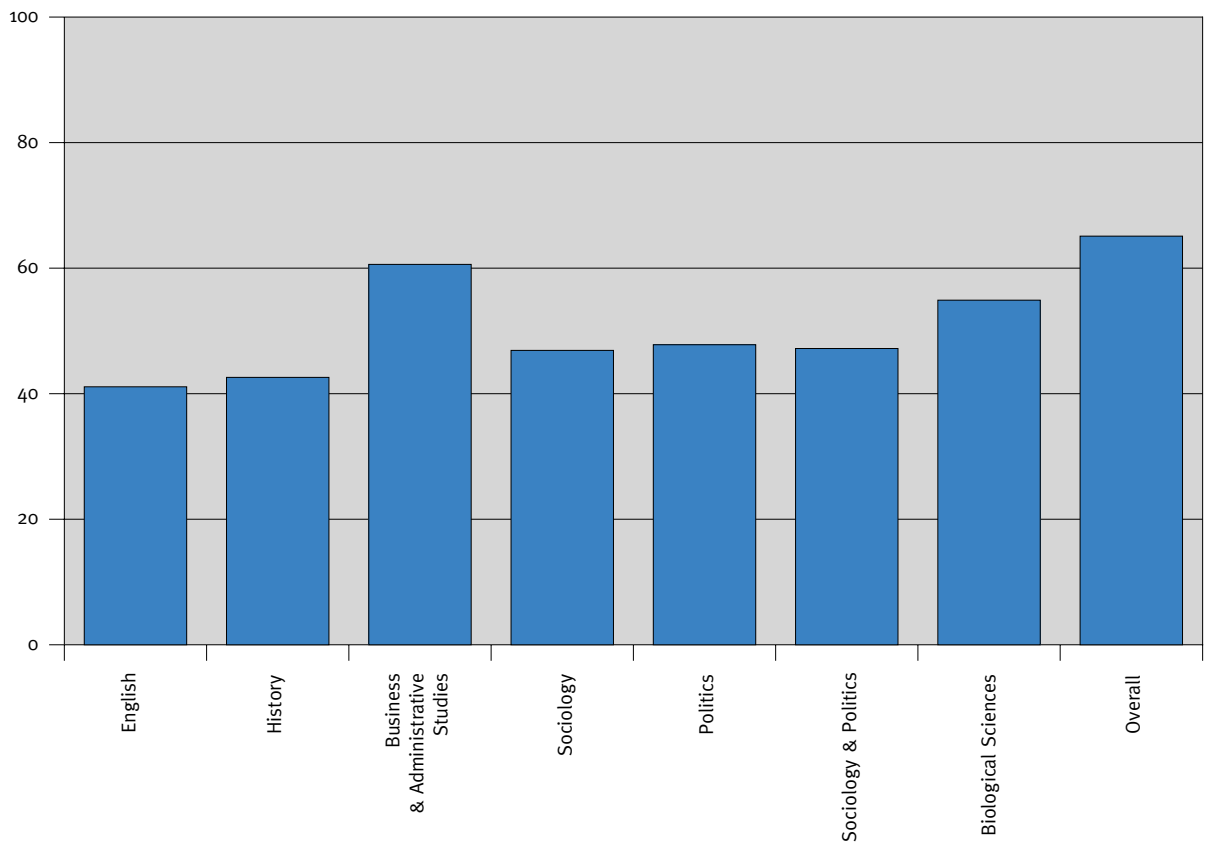


Figure 3: Proportions of graduates in 'graduate level' jobs (%)

Subject differences in graduate employment do not necessarily reflect only the impact of the subject. It is possible that differences between subjects in entry qualifications, gender, class of degree, ethnicity, or age are partly responsible for the apparent subject differences in employment prospects. However, an analysis by HEFCE (HEFCE, 01/21) shows that similar differences between subjects remain, even when the effects of the above factors are controlled for, i.e. between students with the same entry grades, gender, class of degree etc.

3. Three to four years after graduation

We now look at the findings of a recent international study of graduate employment carried out in 11 European countries and Japan. The UK part of the study was undertaken by the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information who produced a report for HEFCE on UK graduates in comparison with their European and Japanese counterparts (Brennan et al, 2001). The analysis provided here looks

specifically at English graduates and has not been published elsewhere⁵. The survey provides a rich source of information on various aspects of the graduates' employment over the first three and a half years after graduation.

Although the overall sample size of this study was nearly 3,000, there are only 79 graduates with an English degree and so the results should be viewed with a certain amount of caution. However, the demographic and educational profile of the 79 accurately reflects that of the total English graduate population in the country from the same year (1995). The majority of them were women (59%) and had started their higher education studies at the traditional entry age, that is, before the age of 22 (74%). Half of the English graduates studied in a pre-1992 university, 30% in a college of higher education but only 20% in a post-1992 university. 47% of them graduated with an upper second class degree.

⁵ This major international study of graduate employment, funded by the European Commission, was conducted in 1998-1999. In the UK 16,104 graduates from the 1995 leaving cohort were randomly selected from 27 UK HE institutions stratified by size and type. Members of the sample were contacted by a mailed questionnaire. The final number of responses was 4,340.

The following analysis will show how English graduates compare to holders of other degrees in terms of their work and study activities during the first three and a half years after graduation.

Length of transition

From Table 5 in Appendix 1 it can be seen that in most cases it is involvement in further academic studies that delays English graduates' entry to the labour market. As Figure 4 makes clear, nearly 50% of English graduates have undertaken further studies in the three years since graduating. When this is taken into account, there is no indication that they have more difficulty in finding jobs than other groups of graduates.⁶ On average, they spend around 3.9 months job searching before obtaining their first after-graduation job. This length of search is quite usual among graduates and is not statistically different from the average.

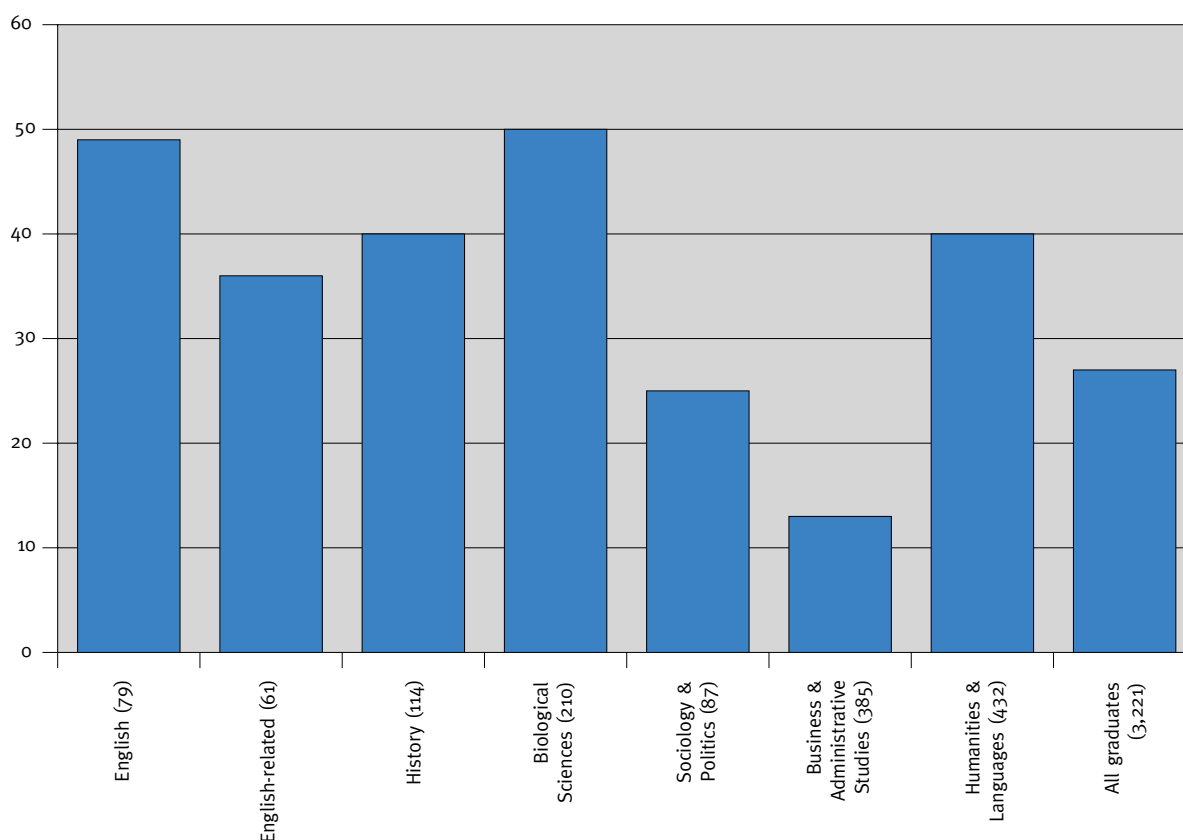


Figure 4: Graduates undertaking further study (%)

⁶ When selecting the fields for comparison we had to consider the number of respondents in the various sub-groups. Making sure that the sub-groups are big enough to make meaningful comparisons and aiming to select a range that helps to explore the characteristics of the English degree efficiently, the following list was selected. (1) 'English-related' subjects, i.e. linguistics; comparative literature; American studies; Celtic languages, literature and culture; Classics. (subjects very close to English, but not part of ESC's coverage). (2) History (a traditional, non-vocational humanities field with traditions similar to those of English studies). (3) Biological Sciences (a traditional, not very vocationally oriented field from the sciences). (4) Sociology and Politics. (5) Business and Administrative Studies (clearly vocationally oriented fields).

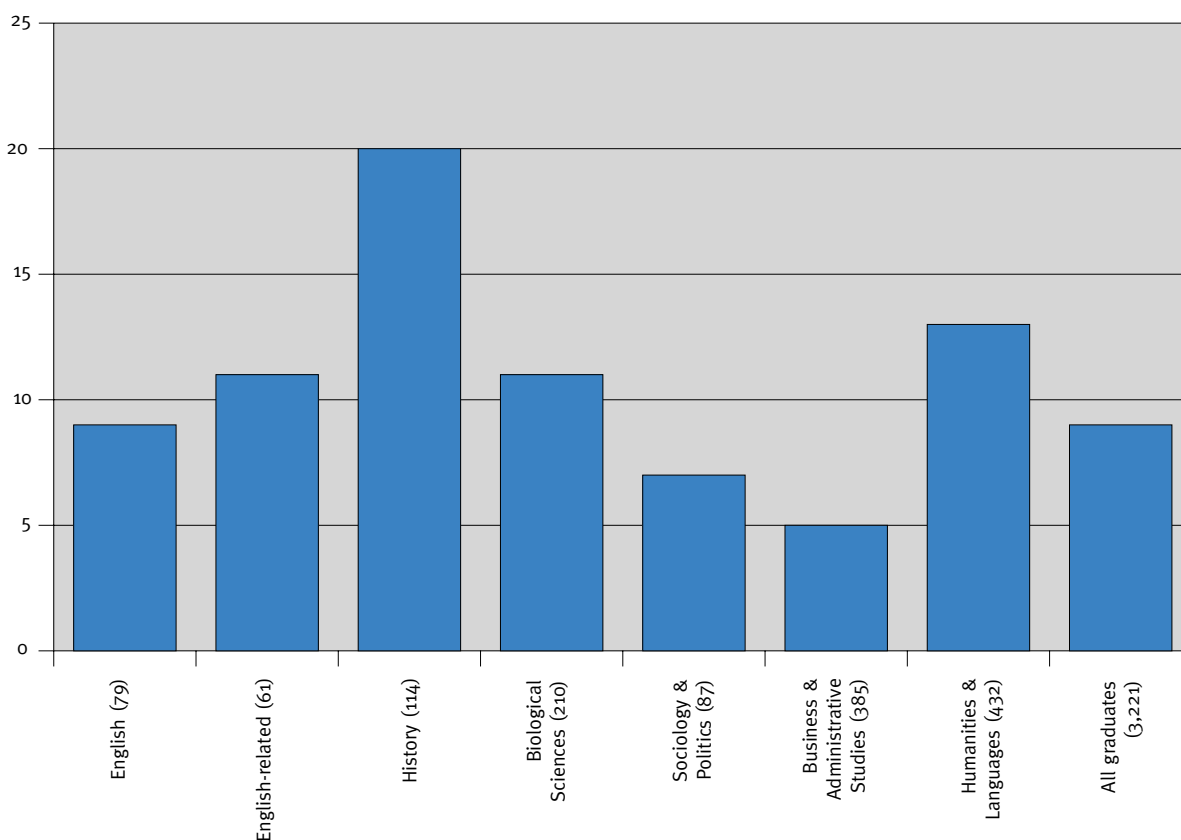


Figure 5: Graduates experiencing a period of unemployment (%)

Similarly, we find no suggestion of exceptional employment difficulties if we look at the occurrence of unemployment in this first three and a half year period. With only 9% experiencing a period of unemployment, English graduates are not at all different from the ‘average’ and seem to be in a better position than History graduates.

Further studies

It is clearly the time spent on further studies that makes the average transition period appear to be unusually long for English graduates – and indeed for many non-vocational degree graduates. In our sample one out of every two graduates with an English degree studied for a further qualification (see Figure 4 above and Table 6 in Appendix 1). Pursuing further academic studies soon after graduation is a frequent choice of first and degree holders in other similar subjects. Nevertheless, the frequency of further studies among English graduates seems to be high even if we make comparisons with other Humanities and Language graduates (40%) or, for example, with graduates in Sociology or Politics (25%).

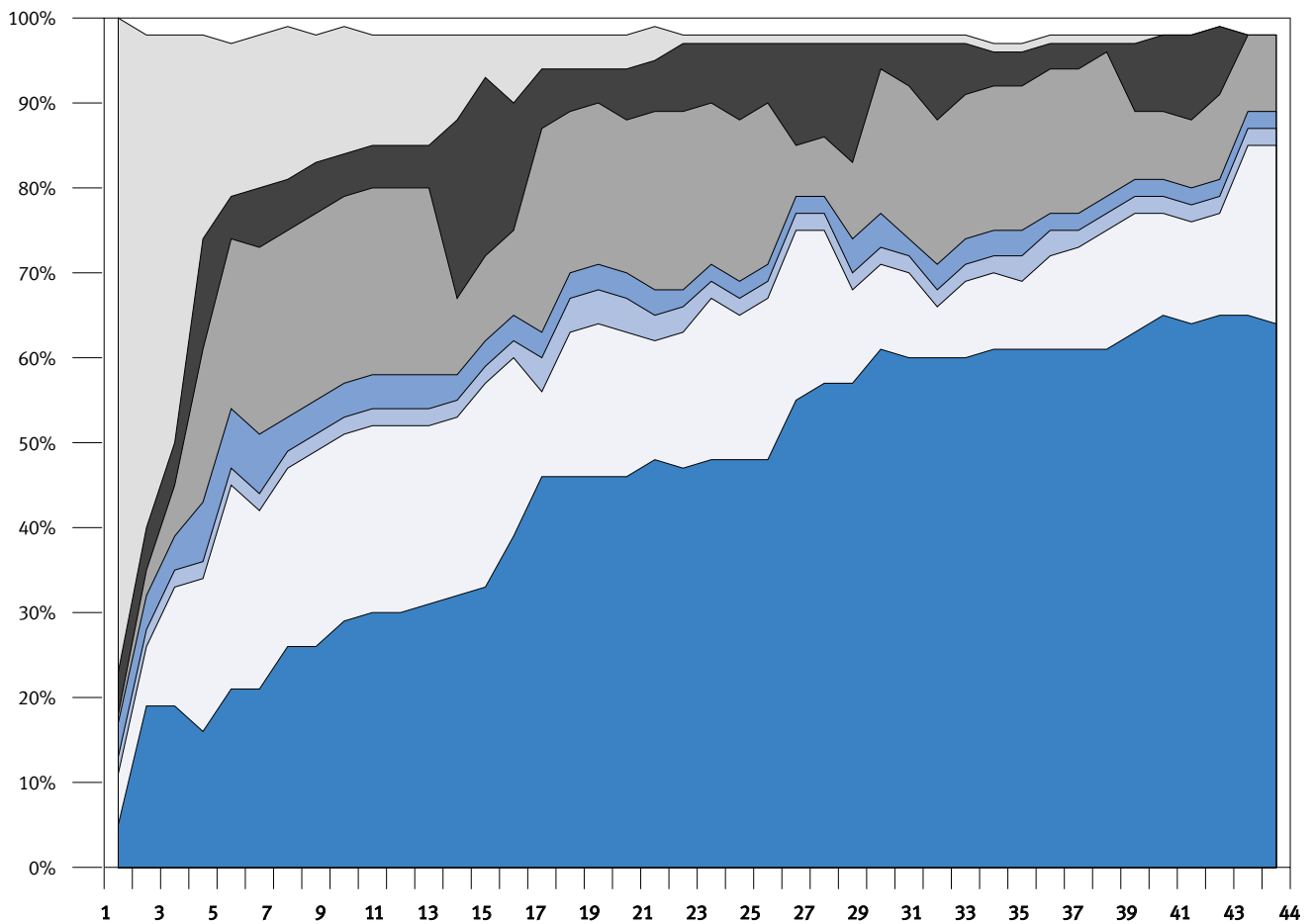
Further study can cover a lot of things and is not necessarily taken immediately after graduation. Nor is it necessarily full-time study. This should be remembered in order to square the above figures with the 28% of English graduates reported by the FDS to be involved in further study six months after graduating. A closer look at the data on further study from graduates three years after graduation shows that it is the Postgraduate Certificate/Diploma that is more ‘popular’ among the English graduates than it is in any of the other groups. This would seem to suggest, therefore, that further study for English students is frequently about preparing for a teaching career. It is not necessarily about studying for a higher degree as a route into academe.

Overview of the transition into employment

Graphs 1 and 2 provide an overview of English and other graduates’ activities in the first three and a half years after their first degree studies. Graph 1 shows English graduates whereas Graph 2 refers to the total graduate body. Comparing them, three features of the transition into employment for English graduates become clear:



- In the first two years of this period the proportion of those working is low among English graduates compared to others.
- The main source of this difference is the high proportion of those 'not in the labour force', usually studying; it is not an indication of unemployment.
- After three and a half years, differences have largely disappeared.

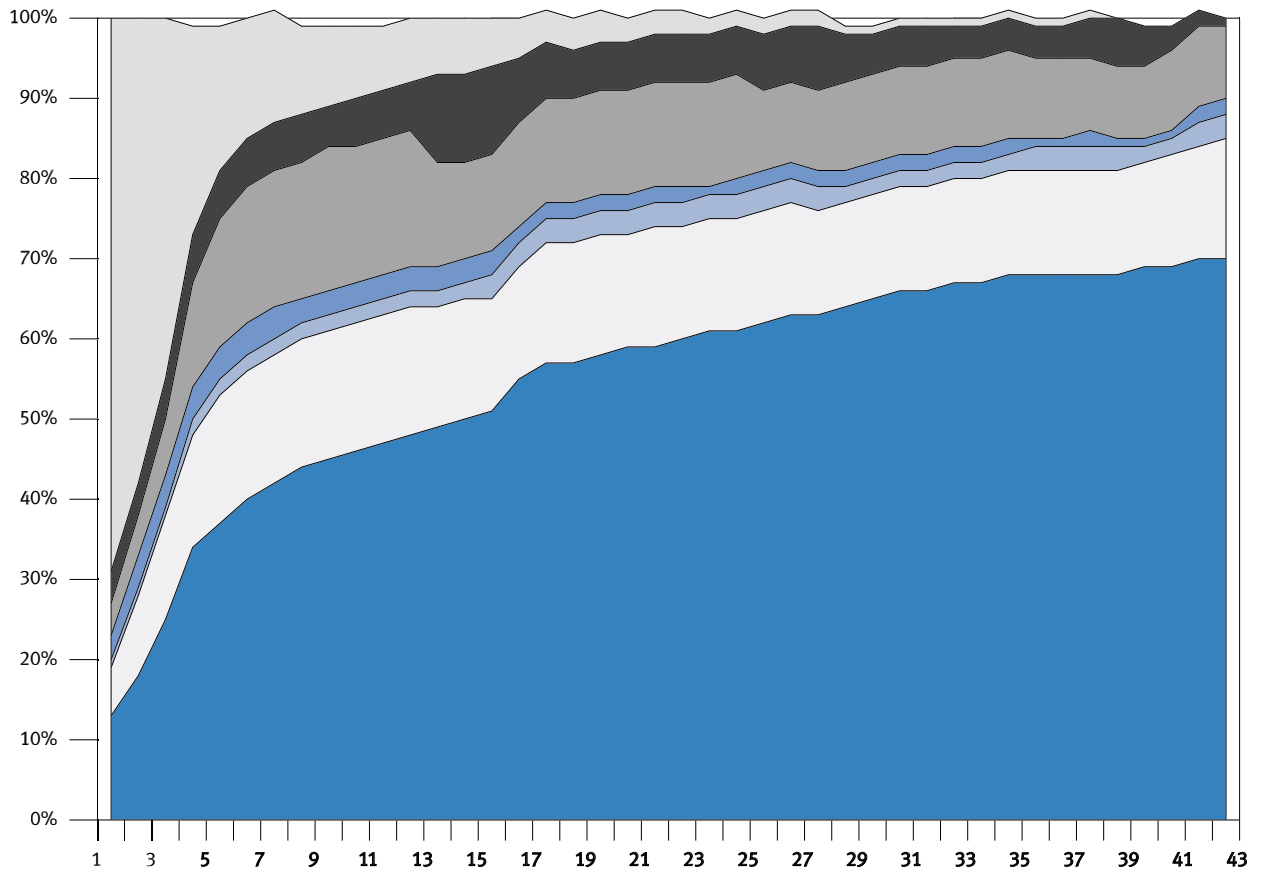


Graph 1: Transition into employment. English graduates

Diminishing differences

By the beginning of the fourth year the labour market activity of English graduates becomes very similar to that of any other group of graduates. With 63% in full-time and 14% in part-time employment (plus 2% in an unspecified job), the distribution of the various labour market activities becomes largely identical to that in the overall graduate body. The normally one-year long full-time postgraduate programmes are finished by this time. The sharp differences in the labour market activities identified by the First Destinations Survey six months after graduation have largely disappeared.

- "Gap" after graduation
- Missing this month
- Not in the labour force
- Unemployed
- Employment unspecified
- Temporary employment
- Permanent employment



Graph 2: Transition into employment. All graduates

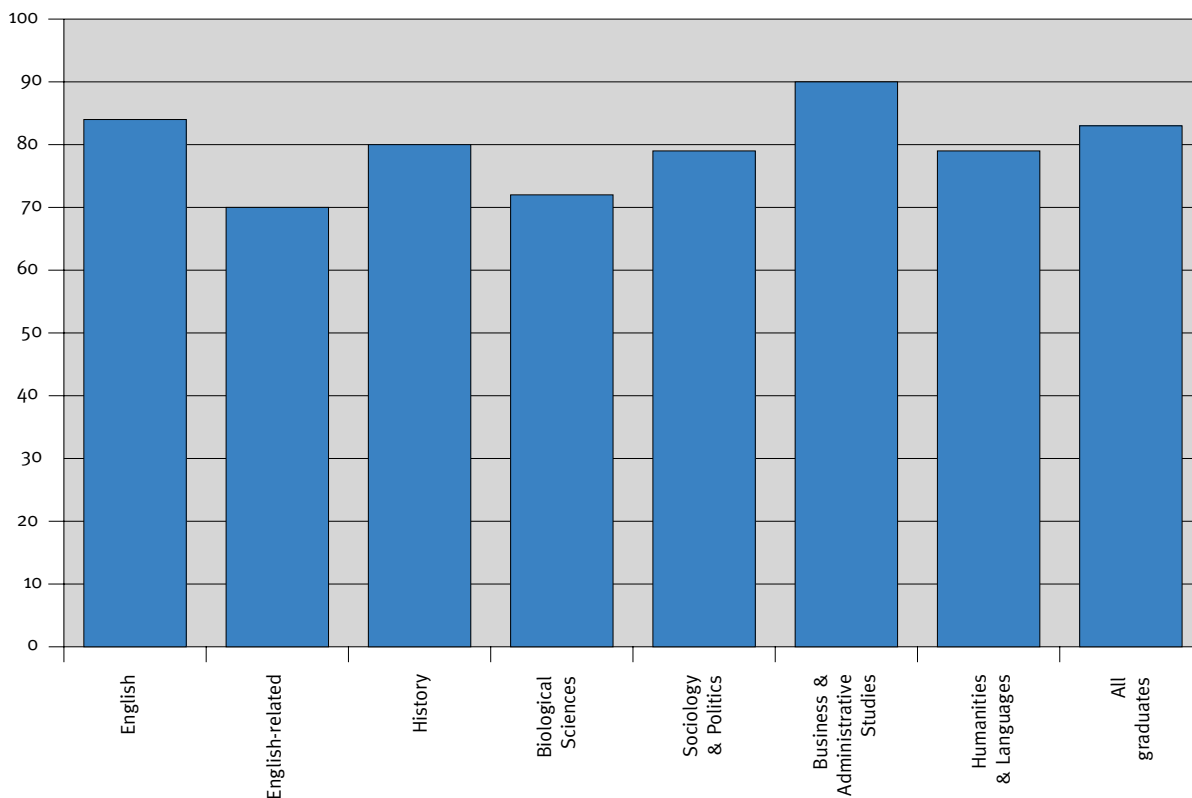


Figure 6: Graduates in employment three and a half years after graduation (%)

Labour market activity

Table 7 in Appendix 1 shows the main activity of the selected graduate groups three and a half years after graduation more closely. Figure 6 below shows the proportions in employment. It confirms what we have seen before: by this time English graduates' participation in the labour market is very similar to that of any other graduate group.

Nature and level of employment

From the survey data there is nothing to suggest that large numbers of English graduates are entering inappropriate work (see Table 8 in Appendix 1). A high proportion of them (84%) work in a professional job or senior managerial job. English graduates seem to do well in securing a job for themselves that is appropriate to their qualifications when compared to graduates in subjects such as the various English-related fields or History. In these fields, a fairly high proportion of graduates go into clerical and other jobs that do not require the possession of a degree. Figure 7 compares the proportions of English graduates entering professional or managerial jobs to the proportions of graduates in other subjects entering similar jobs. English comes out stronger than them all.

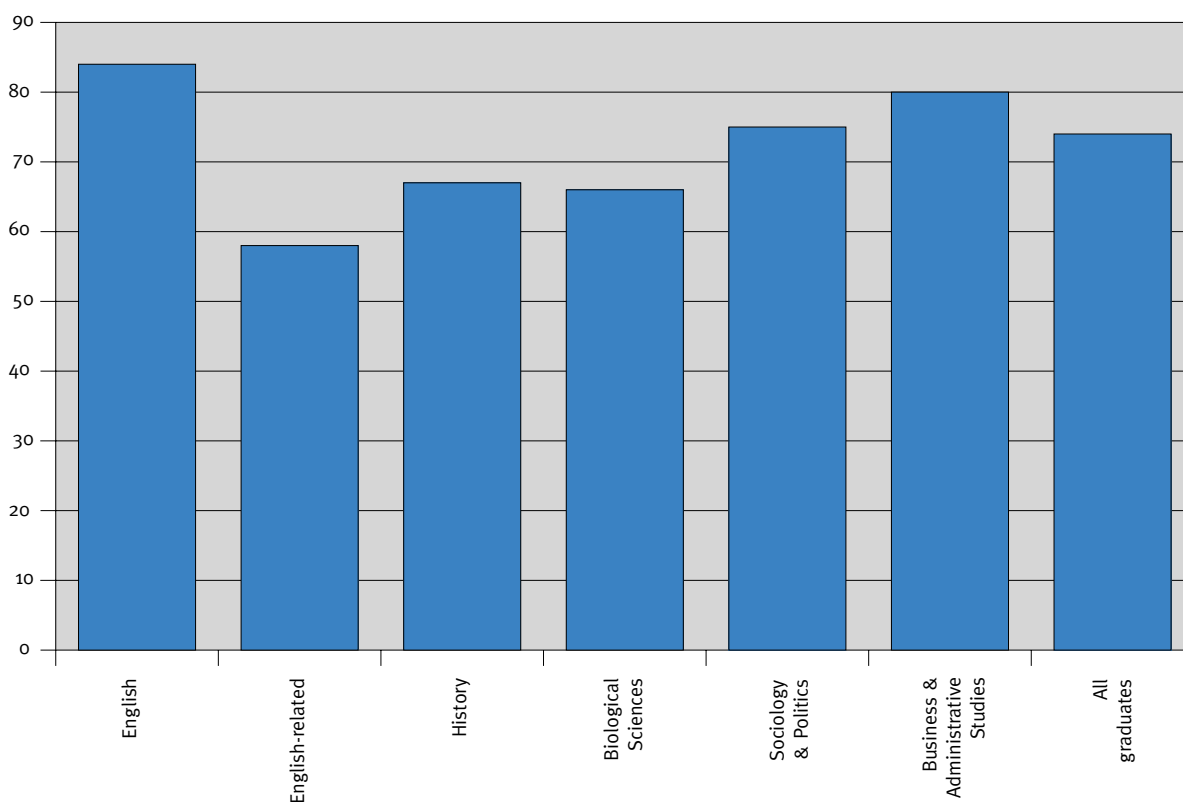


Figure 7: Graduates in professional or managerial jobs three and a half years after graduation (%)

The success of English graduates in finding a job relevant to their qualification level is reflected in some other findings – although to a somewhat lesser extent (see Table 9 in Appendix 1). Two out of three of them are working in a graduate level job⁷ and the same proportion described their job as one that requires a degree. According to both criteria, English graduates are doing slightly worse than the average, but not worse than Humanities and Languages graduates in general. In addition, their position seems to be better than that of graduates in other English-related subjects, History, Sociology or Politics.

But what exactly is it that English graduates are doing? Those in managerial or administrative occupations fall mainly in the ‘other departmental managers’ category. Others were working as general managers, production and operations department managers and only one person was in a senior official job. Among the professional occupations, teaching and other professional activity in secondary education was the most common job, followed by some kind of artistic activity (writing and creative or performing art). More than one of the English graduates in our sample

was working in a library or information-related professional job, in the legal profession, in primary education or as a computing professional. A small number of ‘associate professionals’ could be found in finance and sales jobs, social work or in entertainment and sports-related occupations. The wide range of employment outcomes is striking.

Income

Despite their success in obtaining jobs of an appropriate level to their qualifications, English graduates are not doing particularly well financially (see Figure 8 below and Table 9 in Appendix 1). In fact, their average yearly income was £15,710 at the time this survey was conducted (1998-99). Indeed, it is the lowest among the groups investigated here, although it is not statistically different from the earnings of History graduates (£16,350). The difference between the average graduate income and the average income of an English graduate is quite large, (over £4,500 a year). But there is also a gap of £1,500 between the incomes of English graduates and all Humanities and Languages graduates.

⁷ The ‘Moving On’ study (Elias, 1999 pp.16-17) distinguished between graduate, graduate-track and non-graduate jobs.

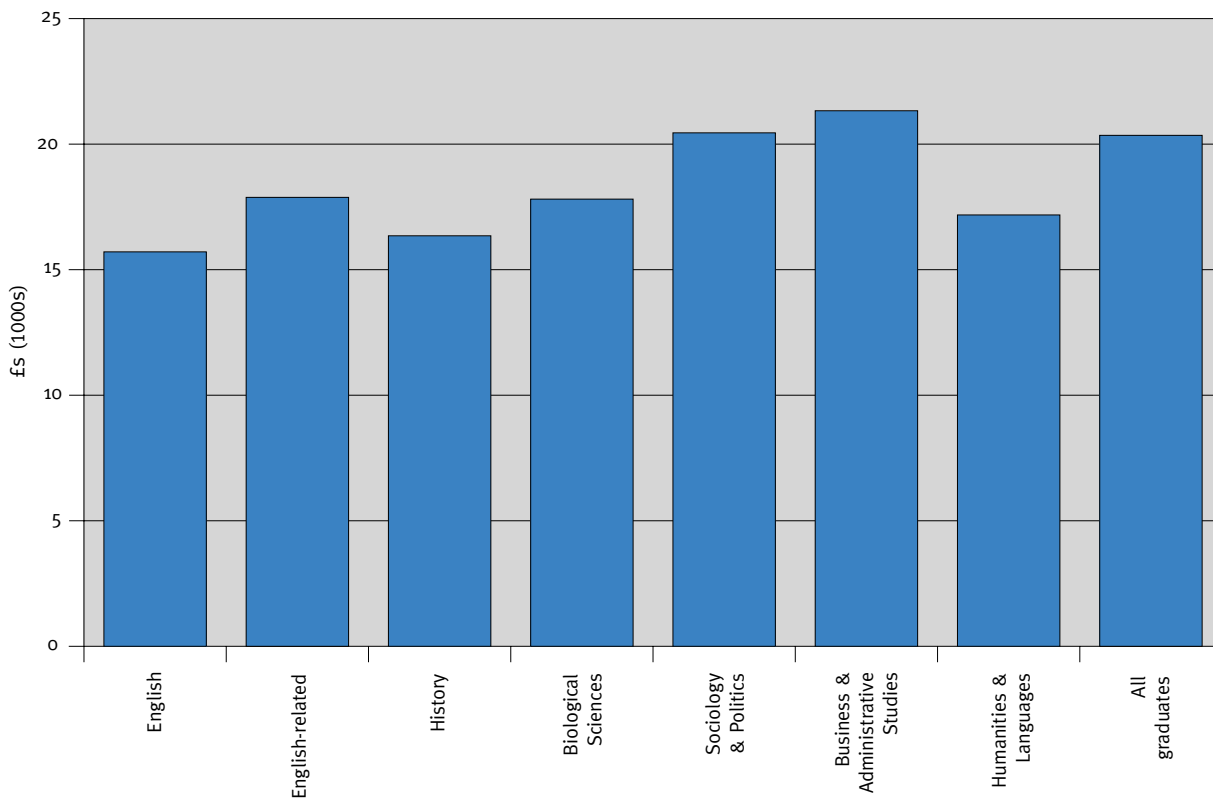


Figure 8: Average graduate yearly income three and a half years after graduation

Economic sectors

The low average salary of English graduates can be attributed to the relatively high proportion employed outside the private sector (see Table 10 in Appendix 1). With 45% in the public sector and 12% in non-profit organisations, English graduates are under-represented in the private sector – not only in comparison to the graduates as a whole but to Humanities and Languages graduates specifically. Indeed, there is also a difference between English and History in this respect, with the private sector attracting many more History graduates.

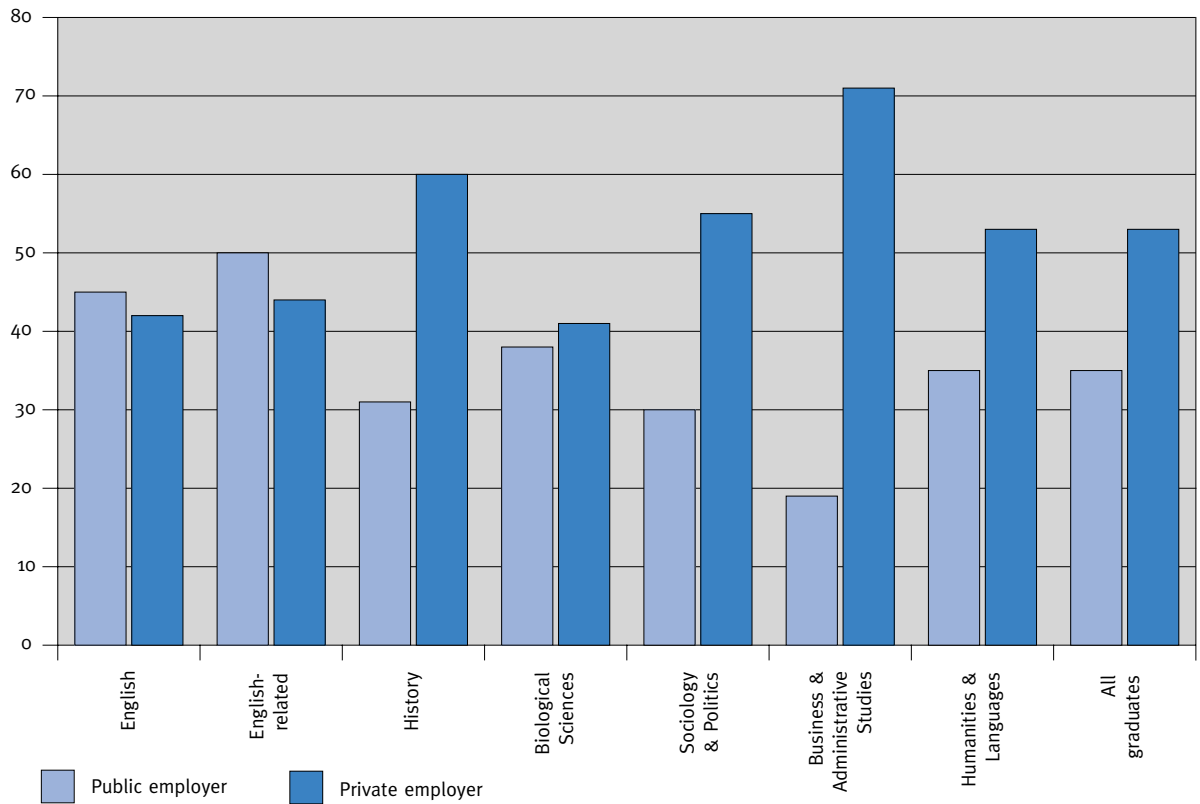


Figure 9: Graduate employment in the public and private sectors three and a half years after graduation (%)

This has inevitable consequences for the salary levels of English graduates. Irrespective of the subject studied, higher incomes are paid in the private sector, followed by public employers and finally the non-profit sector. And since the public and non-profit sectors together provide 57% of English graduates' jobs, this naturally has a negative impact on salaries.

Job satisfaction

English graduates' satisfaction with their employment situation is the same as the average among other Humanities and Language graduates (see Figure 10 below and Table 11 in Appendix 1). In both groups, 46% reported fairly high levels of satisfaction.

Less positive, however, is the view graduates give about their jobs when they take into account their earlier expectations (Figure 11 below). Asked whether their work situation meets the expectations they had when entering higher education, only 19% of graduates with an English degree gave a firm 'yes'. This is significantly lower than the respective figures in most of the other groups listed here. Comparisons with the

overall graduate body show that only half as many English graduates as graduates from other subjects felt no disappointment about their employment situation.

Although the overall employment situation of English graduates compares quite well to that of graduates from comparable subjects (with the important exception of salary), the diversity of employment outcomes for English graduates and the interaction between educational and social characteristics in determining employment must be borne in mind. Behind the generally positive picture may be a grimmer reality for certain groups of students, especially those who have attended the less prestigious institutions.

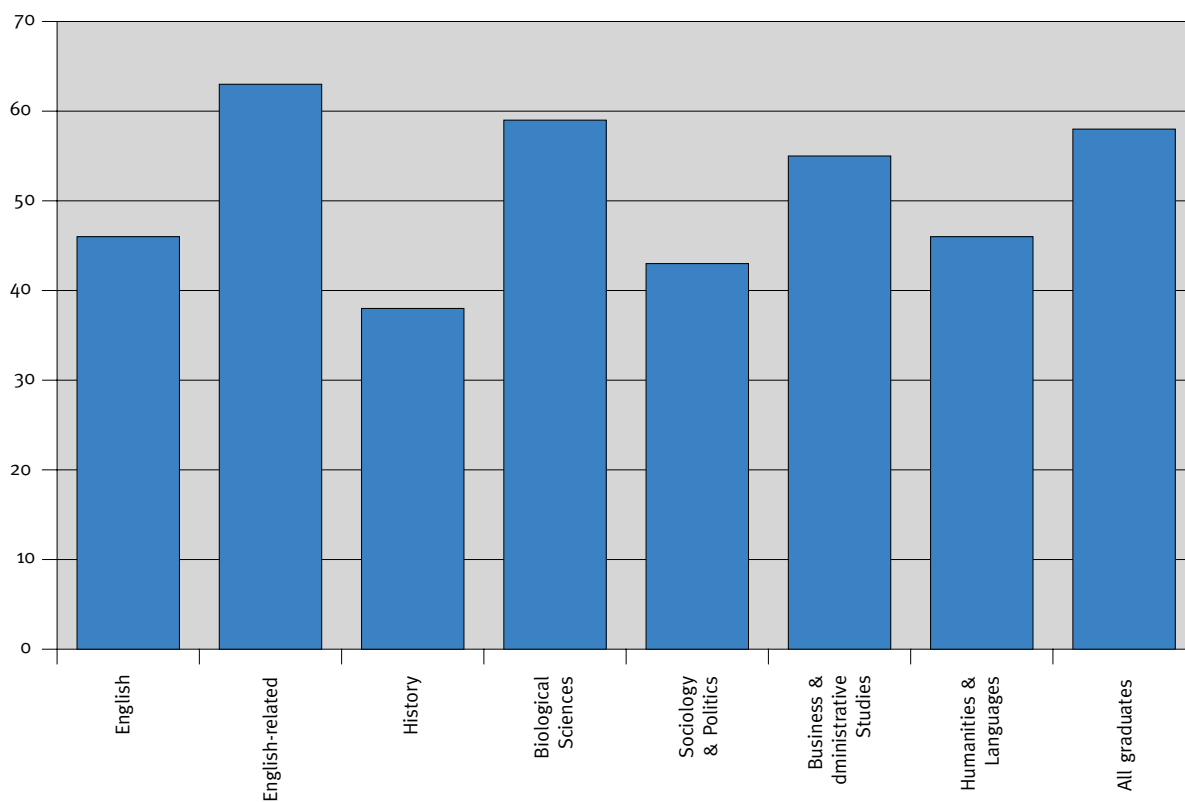


Figure 10: Satisfaction with current employment situation three and a half years after graduation (%)

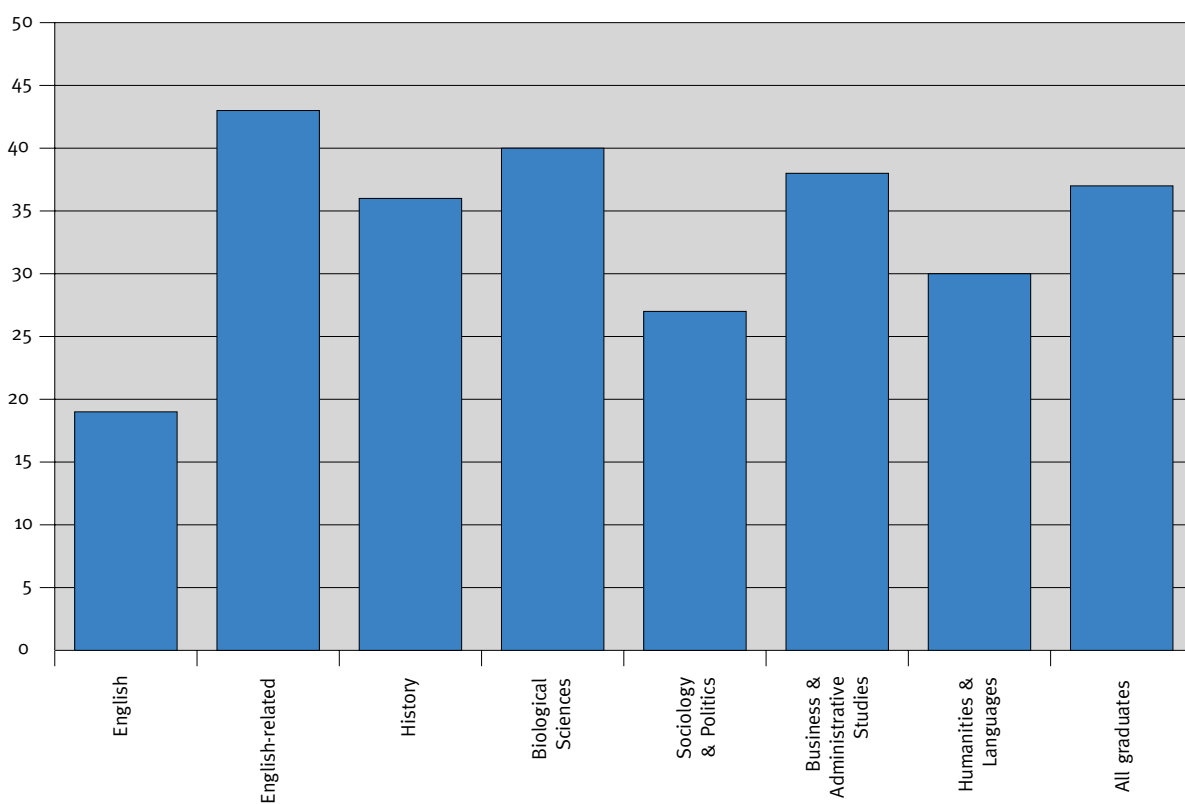


Figure 11: Current employment situation three and a half years after graduation better than expected (%)

Section 3: The distinctive profile of the English degree

The aim of this part of the report is to explore the ways in which English degrees, and the various abilities, competences and skills they represent, are being profiled, both within awards and in other contexts such as Benchmark Statements. In carrying out this research, three approaches were taken. The first approach was to analyse the messages English departments were presenting on their websites and in their programme documentation (including programme specifications where available) in relation to the various abilities, competences and transferable skills that awards in English signify. The second approach was to compare the English benchmark statement with those in a number of other subjects (Biosciences; General Business and Management; History; Languages and Related Studies; Law; Politics and International Relations; and Sociology). The third approach was to

use the graduate survey mentioned in Section 1 of this report to analyse graduates' perceptions of the skills they possessed at the time of their graduation. Each of these three approaches will be discussed in turn.

Messages on websites

This approach involved a random selection of websites of English departments and was undertaken in June/July 2002. Thirty-three websites in total were analysed, which covered 13 pre-1992 universities, 13 post-1992 universities and seven colleges of higher education (of which four were in Scotland and one in Wales). In terms of the awards, over half were part of combined or modular programmes, while others were single or joint honours⁸.

Of the 33 websites analysed, the following information was found:

<i>Types of information presented on website</i>	<i>Number of websites offering information</i>
Abilities, competences and skills (including types of careers English graduates enter)	19
Examples of types of careers English graduates enter	7
Subject-specific learning outcomes	4
None found	3

⁸ In terms of accessing the websites, two main approaches were used in an attempt to gather the information required about abilities, competences and skills acquired from English awards. The first approach was to attempt to access the information as a 'prospective student'. If this approach did not yield the information required, the Department website was accessed. Overall, most information was found using the former approach, although often additional information was to be found using the second approach (and in a few cases, the 'search' facility).

In terms of the types of abilities, competences and skills English departments were saying they would develop in their students, the following were revealed in the analysis:

<i>Types of abilities, competences and skills presented on website</i>	<i>Number of websites offering information</i>
Written/oral communication skills	16
Critical analysis and evaluation	11
Lucid and confident presentation of argument in writing/speech	9
Research	9
IT	8
Independent study	7
Team work	7
Time management	6
Interpretation	4
Problem-solving	4

Around two-thirds of the websites offered information to prospective students on the types of careers they might expect to enter once they graduate. These were wide-ranging and the following table presents the main types of careers mentioned.

<i>Types of careers English graduates enter</i>	<i>Number of websites offering information</i>
Journalism	17
Teaching	16
Media	15
Publishing	13
Postgraduate study	12
Personnel	9
Advertising	5
Arts administration	5
Civil Service	5
Administration	5
Retailing	5
Marketing	5

Other types of careers that English graduates entered mentioned on the websites (four or below mentions) included law, industry, banking, accountancy, local government, insurance, leisure and tourism and public relations.

Websites of English departments were also searched for information on programme specifications. According to the 'Guidelines for preparing programme specifications' produced by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA, 2000), the aim of programme specifications (derived from the findings of

the Dearing Committee) should be to provide ‘clear and explicit information for students so that they can make informed choices about their studies and the levels they are aiming to achieve’. (Further information on programme specifications can be found in Appendix 5.) However, in the analysis of websites, while teaching learning and assessment strategies, and programme structures and requirements were well represented, the aims of the programme and to a lesser extent the programme outcomes (see analysis above), were not so well represented.

Upon a more detailed search of English departments’ websites, three universities had published programme specifications for their English awards on their websites. However, the extent to which certain of the ‘users’ of programme specifications, as defined by the QAA guidelines, would be able to find this information (if they had knowledge of its potential existence) is open to speculation. No further analysis of these programme specifications is undertaken here as the sample is too small and is not representative of English departments in the UK⁹.

Comparison of the English benchmark statement with other subjects

For the second approach to this part of the research, a comparison was made of the English benchmark statement against those of seven other subjects; these include Languages and Related Studies, Politics and International Relations, Sociology, General Business and Management, Law, History and Biosciences.

In comparing the benchmark statement with the other seven subject statements, only non-subject-specific skills were compared for obvious reasons. These skills were labelled in a variety of ways and differed between each of the eight subjects; some of the terminology included the following: generic, transferable, intellectual, cognitive, graduate, key, practical, interpersonal skills. Moreover, each subject had different ways of describing these skills, which made comparisons difficult. What is presented below is an attempt to interpret the skills’ statements presented by each of the benchmark statements.

English generic and graduate skills

	Languages and Related Studies	Politics and International Relations	Sociology	General Business and Management	Law	History	Biosciences
Literacy/communication skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Analytical/critical skills	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Adapt/transfer disciplinary methods	✓			✓		✓	✓
Acquire complex information/interpretative skills	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
Planning/execution of essay/project work							
Independent thought/judgement	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Critical reasoning		✓		✓	✓	✓	
Understand/develop intricate concepts							
Team work	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Understand/apply/interrogate variety of theoretical positions	✓	✓	✓				
Critical/self-reflective handling of information/argument	✓	✓	✓		✓		
Research skills	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
IT skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Time management/organisation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

⁹ The development, use and publication of programme specifications are part of the documentation on information about the quality of programmes and standards of awards that HEIs are expected to provide for QAA institutional audits. Audits will be introduced from 2002-03 with a transition period between 2002 and 2004. The availability of this information within HEIs is expected to progressively increase during the transition period with the full range of information available by the end of 2004.

From the above, the statements from other subjects that most reflect the skills described by the English benchmark statement are Languages and Related Studies, Politics and International Relations, and Law. Only two ('planning/execution of essay/project work' and 'understand/develop intricate concepts') of the skills mentioned in the English benchmark statement appear to be unique to English, at least in the sense that other subject groups did not think to mention them. The common generic and graduate skills which are mentioned across all the subject benchmark statements are:

- Literacy/communication skills
- Team work
- IT skills
- Time management/organisation

A number of skills were identified that were not explicitly cited in the English benchmark statement, but explicitly stated by the other subjects. These are described below.

Languages and related studies	Notetaking/summarising Problem-solving Mediating/empathic qualities Adaptability/flexibility Intercultural competence
Politics and international relations	Use of constructive feedback Problem-solving
Sociology	Learning and study skills Statistical/quantitative skills
History	Problem-solving Empathy and imaginative insight
Law	Use, presentation and evaluation of information in statistical/quantitative form Seek and make use of feedback
General business and management	Problem-solving and decision-making Numeracy/quantitative skills Learning skills Self-awareness, openness and sensitivity to diversity Listening skills
Biosciences	Numeracy/quantitative skills Problem-solving Evaluation of own and others' performances Respecting others' views Lifelong learning Adaptable, flexible and effective approach to work/study

The main skill mentioned in five of the seven benchmark statements, but absent from English, is 'problem-solving'. In the search of the messages on English department websites, however, problem-solving was mentioned by four of the 19 sites offering information on abilities, competences and skills

acquired from studying English. Of the other skills presented on the websites, these reflect the types of generic and graduate skills described in the English benchmark statement, although the full range of skills (as represented by the statement) is less in evidence.

Self-reported skills and competences of English graduates

The third approach to this part of the research involved looking at the data collected from the survey of graduates mentioned above in Section 2 – ‘Higher education and graduate employment in Europe’. In particular, an analysis was undertaken of graduates’ perceptions of the skills they possessed at the time of their graduation¹⁰.

According to their own judgement, the major strengths of English graduates were:

- Written communication skills (with far the highest value)
- Documenting ideas and information
- Learning abilities
- Working independently
- Creativity
- Oral communication skills
- Tolerance, appreciating different points of view
- Critical thinking

When, however, competing for a job with graduates from other fields, it is not necessarily the absolute level of the skills that matters but rather the relative one. In other words, it is worthwhile investigating how English graduates compare with other graduates.

Compared with other graduates, English graduates rated themselves particularly highly in terms of the following:

- Written communication skills
- Documenting ideas and information
- Creativity
- Tolerance, appreciating of different points of view
- Oral communication skills
- Critical thinking

This means that of the areas mentioned in the first list but not in the second one (learning abilities, working independently), English graduates’ perceptions of their competences are shared by graduates in other subjects. In the second list, however, they are significantly better (or, equally important, they believe they are better) than the majority of other graduates.

These perceived strengths also apply to the broader group of Humanities and Language graduates. Written and oral communications skills, tolerance and critical thinking seem to be typical of those with similar degrees. There are still two areas, however, where English graduates reported a higher level of competency than their counterparts from the closest fields. These are documenting ideas and information and creativity.

The weakest points reported by English graduates are as follows:

- Field-specific knowledge of methods
- Applying rules and regulations
- Negotiating
- Understanding complex social, organisational and technical systems
- Manual skills
- Foreign language proficiency
- Economic reasoning

Again, many of these ‘weaknesses’ are not specific to this particular group of graduates, but are fairly common among all graduates. Still, there are skills that English graduates appear to be lacking to a greater extent than the majority of graduates. These are:

- Field-specific knowledge of methods
- Applying rules and regulations
- Understanding complex social, organisational and technical systems
- Manual skills
- Economic reasoning

¹⁰ The study asked respondents to indicate on a 5-point scale the level to which they had possessed various skills and competences at the time of their graduation. Point 5 on this scale meant ‘to a great extent’ and 1 indicated the response ‘not at all’. Results from this study are analysed in this section (see Appendix 2 for full details).

The majority of these shortcomings are fairly general among all the Humanities and Language graduates. The only area where an English degree seems to make graduates less prepared than other similar degrees is economic reasoning¹¹.

More importantly, though, there are some areas which, although not at the bottom of English graduates' skill-list, can still disadvantage them when they compete with other graduates. The areas English graduates reported significantly lower levels of competency than most of their counterparts include:

- Problem-solving ability
- Working under pressure
- Working in a team
- Time management
- Fitness for work
- Planning, co-ordinating and organising
- Computer skills

In some of these areas all the Language and Humanities graduates are doing relatively poorly compared to other graduates. However, there are certain areas where English graduates perceive themselves to be particularly weak:

- Working under pressure
- Time management
- Fitness for work

Written and oral communication skills and critical thinking – just some of the strengths mentioned by English graduates themselves – are skills explicitly mentioned in the English benchmark statement. They are also some of the most mentioned skills found in the search of English department websites. Indeed these are the skills (along with learning and self-development, and creativity) that employers believed the English degree was best at in developing skills in graduates¹². Therefore, according to our 79 English graduates, the majority of the websites that provided information on skills development and employers, English departments are doing a good job at developing these skills in their students. However, these skills are only two of a set of 'generic and graduate skills' that are described in the English benchmark statement as being the attributes and capabilities of those holding an English degree.

As reported above, there are some skills that English graduates believe they are less competent at than other graduates. If we compare the skills English graduates¹³ feel they lack to those the English benchmark statement reports they should possess, there is mismatch in terms of developing team work, time management/organisation and IT skills. Moreover, these same skills were all mentioned to a greater or lesser extent in the search of websites. And indeed, in the study conducted by the Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE), employers felt that English degrees were worst at developing time management and building relationships (along with analysis, pro-activity, adaptability/flexibility and integrity). Although the evidence presented here is limited, it suggests that English departments may not be developing the full range of attributes and capabilities as outlined in the benchmark statement.

¹¹ In fact there is a similar case with foreign language proficiency. But since it is the speciality of most language graduates and a competency naturally widespread in this group, there is no point in comparing English graduates to other language graduates in this dimension.

¹² Employers were asked in a study carried out by the Council for Industry and Higher Education how they perceived skills development through undergraduate study and how far these perceptions reflect subject benchmark statements. Three subject disciplines were included in the study: English, Engineering, and Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism. Further details of this study can be found in Section 4.

¹³ It should be noted that these graduates took their degrees well before benchmark statements were developed.

Section 4: The employer view of the English degree

Investigating employers' views of the English degree is a difficult task. As can be seen from the statistical data (Section 2), English graduates spread over a broad range of types of employment and carry out a large number of activities. They tend to take up jobs where an English degree is not a prerequisite and graduates from any discipline can apply¹⁴.

Employers' views and experiences of graduates are seldom linked to any specific degree discipline. This is partly because after the recruitment process, in most cases field of study loses its importance and employers will not even be able to tell what subjects their recruits have studied.

Existing research tends to focus on employers' perceptions of graduates' performance, the importance of various graduate skills and recruitment policies without making much differentiation by curricular background¹⁵. The rare attempts to make employers distinguish between graduates by curricula fail to lead to much success. A study commissioned by the Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE, 1997) on Humanities graduates found that the finest distinction employers were ready to make was one between Arts and Humanities versus other degrees. They claimed that field of study was not the most significant factor that would determine skills and competences of potential recruits.

Given these restrictions, in the following overview we not only look at the (few) findings that relate to English graduates but also summarise the answers existing research has found to the broader question: 'how do employers perceive Languages, Arts or Humanities degrees?'

Based only on interviews with six employers¹⁶, the authors of the above CIHE report suggest that employers have a fairly positive view of Arts and Humanities graduates and found that in most cases they possessed the skills required. They also found that

Arts and Humanities graduates compared well to others as far as general interpersonal abilities were concerned.

However, some employers shared the assumption that Arts and Humanities degree courses do not provide the opportunity to engage in teamwork or any project work with presentation elements, and therefore these graduates might lack some essential skills. But, as the comment of one interviewee suggested, this belief was often accompanied by ignorance of how Arts and Humanities subjects are actually taught.

A further relevant message from the interviews (and indeed from many similar studies) was that work experience is highly valued by graduate employers. As this CIHE report shows, in the context of Arts and Humanities degrees, this means that often it is the lack of work experience that handicaps graduates and not the content of their degree itself¹⁷.

In a more recent study (Employability: Employer Perceptions of Subject Benchmark Statements, CIHE 2002 <http://www.cihe-uk.com/employability.htm>), English was included among the three disciplines that employers were invited to evaluate. Altogether 26 graduate employers commented on a range of skills and competences drawn from the respective subject benchmark statements. They were asked to indicate whether they could recognise these skills as ones that were developed in each of the disciplines.

Commenting on English graduates, the majority of the 26 employers recognised communication skills, critical thinking, learning and self-development, and creativity. At the same time, only a fairly small minority of them agreed that 'influencing skills' of English graduates were well developed and even less employers acknowledged their analytical competences, pro-activity, relationship building, time management and organisational skills. In addition, adaptability, integrity and IT skills were often missed. Nevertheless,

¹⁴ The Salary and Vacancy Survey (published in Graduate Market Trends) that analyses graduate jobs advertised in Prospects Today (see www.prospects.ac.uk) found that between April 2001 and May 2002 over 60% of the vacancies were open to graduates from any discipline. At the same time, there was no job to be found where holding an English degree specifically would have been a necessity or indeed an advantage (Careers Services Unit, 2002).

¹⁵ Or if they do, they usually focus on one or other vocational degree, for example, Engineering or Chemistry. Main employers in these fields are fairly easy to identify and since field of study often plays an important role in the selection of the recruits, employers develop a strong view about the degrees.

¹⁶ All from the private sector: four from large, multinational companies, two from smaller ones.

¹⁷ Results from the graduate study carried out by CHERI (HEFCE, 2001) shows that among the 1994/95 English graduates only 69% had some kind of work-experience, whereas the respective figure was 82% in the overall graduate body.

a few employers suggested that English degree programmes develop persuasiveness, drive, judgement, conceptual thinking and confidence.

In this research, English was the only Humanities subject investigated. Therefore, it is not possible to tell whether the characteristics attributed to this particular degree are to any extent specific to English in the employers' view or whether other similar non-vocational Humanities subjects would also be described with similar attributes.

Some caution needs to be expressed about the statements made by employers. In a review for UNESCO, Ulrich Teichler questions whether such statements should be interpreted as providing direct and objective information concerning demand in the employment system and notes that such statements are often inconsistent with recruitment and personnel policies and practices (*Teichler, 1998*). Teichler goes on to note that neither graduates, their supervisors nor heads of personnel can be expected to be knowledgeable experts on the appropriate links between skills and work tasks, and yet many research studies treat their views as statements of objective fact.

Notwithstanding the above caveats, Teichler's UNESCO review finds an 'amazing consensus' about the attributes employers appear to expect to find in their graduate recruits. Graduates are expected to:

- Be flexible
- Be able and willing to contribute to innovation and be creative
- Be able to cope with uncertainties
- Be interested in and prepared for life-long learning
- Have acquired social sensitivity and communicative skills
- Be able to work in teams
- Be willing to take on responsibilities
- Become entrepreneurial
- Prepare themselves for the internationalisation of the labour market through an understanding of various cultures

Section 5: Current departmental work in graduate employability

In carrying out this part of our research, a search was undertaken to identify initiatives and projects being conducted in English departments that responded to the employability agenda. Our search covered well-known and well-established externally-funded programmes such as the Innovations Fund, HEFCE's Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning, Teaching and Learning Technology Programme, and its research and development projects, the Department for Education and Skills, and many others. In particular, we also looked at the initiatives and projects funded by the English Subject Centre itself.

We have only been able to identify three projects that are specific to English departments. However, this does not mean that English departments are doing nothing regarding the employability agenda. A look at Section 6 and Appendix 4 of this report highlights over 20 current or completed projects relating to the employability agenda in cognate areas such as the Arts and Humanities, many of which are cross-institutional. We also limited our search to externally-funded projects (due to the constraints set by the project terms of reference and timetable); these limitations will exclude projects that are underway in English departments as part of institutional initiatives and/or every day curriculum development processes.

The three 'English' projects include two funded by the English Subject Centre and one by HEFCE's Fund for Good Management Practice. (Full details of each of these, including objectives, methods, outcomes and sources of further information, can be found in Appendix 3.)

Two of these projects involve surveys of English graduates. One aims to raise 'awareness of the employment prospects of English students and, if appropriate, suggest ways of adapting the curriculum to meet student employment needs' ('English in the workplace' project). The other is a survey of graduates (including English graduates) to find out how their jobs relate to their study, how well university education prepared them for their jobs, and the skills and knowledge acquired on leaving university and those required to carry out their jobs ('Our students in the workforce' project).

The third is a continuation of a project funded by HEFCE in 1997 ('Speak-Write' project). The aim of the initial HEFCE project was to promote the acquisition of advanced written and oral communication skills among first year undergraduates in English through research into practice, design of teaching materials and their dissemination. The aim of this current project is to disseminate the original materials, broadcast new research and trial developing materials, including the re-launch of a consultancy service to English departments to respond to demand.

The effectiveness of these and other schemes are difficult to discern. Few rigorous evaluations have been carried out. But it is worth reiterating a point made in Section 1. The employability of English graduates is likely to be particularly influenced by the institution attended and the graduates' own social and cultural background. This might suggest that some graduates have more to gain from these sorts of initiatives than others. And a current study being carried out by CHERI for the funding councils and others suggests that it might be issues of confidence raising, self-esteem and aspirations that are more important than skills and competences in securing good employment for graduates from lower socio-economic backgrounds or certain ethnic minorities (Brennan and Shah, 2002).

Section 6: Relevant initiatives in cognate areas

The initiatives reported and described in Appendix 4 all have a common theme – improving the employability of graduates (including some which focus on postgraduates and research students) through the development of skills. They have been selected because of their closeness to the discipline (i.e. some specifically focus on the Arts and Humanities), and/or because they operate across institutions or can be easily applied to any discipline.

Undoubtedly there are many other initiatives, not funded from the above or other external sources, that are taking place in higher education institutions. Moreover, there are many externally-funded initiatives that relate to the employability agenda, which have not been included here. These include the huge amount of work that has and is continuing to be done on work experience, work-based learning, personal development plans, recording achievement and so on. The need to

limit the length of our report to a manageable size has not allowed us to search out and include these initiatives. However, much of the information on these initiatives can be found using the sources listed above.

The information on the initiatives included in Appendix 4 comprises the objectives, methods and outcomes of each of the projects. It also provides details of where to obtain further information, including those for the sources listed above. Most project outcomes include a report and many involve the production of materials to help departments to innovate – these can be found using the details listed.

Four examples of the projects outlined in the appendix are shown below. These are all national initiatives as opposed to those projects undertaken by individual or consortia of higher education institutions.

A review of graduate employability in the humanities and social sciences

Co-ordinator:	British Academy
Funder:	British Academy
Timescale:	Report to be published Autumn 2002
Objectives:	To articulate evidence on the employability prospects for graduates in the humanities and social sciences. To explore ways in which the benefits of humanities and social science degrees can be more effectively communicated to potential students, graduates in these disciplines, and employers. To highlight the implications of the employability agenda to academics.
Methods:	Statistical evidence will be sought through HESA's First Destinations Survey six months after graduation and trends will be analysed from 1994/95 to 2000/01. Longitudinal data will be sought from the Labour Force Survey and the National Child Development Study, focusing on graduates born between 1940 and 1980. The findings of secondary sources will be examined of other studies in this area. In addition, qualitative evidence will be sought to gain information on students, universities and employers perceptions of the employment prospects for graduates, and to obtain more detail, especially on specific subjects within the humanities and social sciences.
	Questions to be addressed include: What are the employment prospects for graduates in the humanities and social sciences?

	How do they compare to those for other disciplines?
	What skills are employers looking for in recently qualified graduates? How do they view qualifications in the humanities and social sciences?
	How do humanities and social science degrees relate to general market needs?
	What are students' perceptions of the value of degrees in humanities and social sciences?
Outcomes:	A brief report on the findings and recommendations will be prepared, which will be launched at a one-day conference attended by representatives from universities, careers advisory services, employers, student representative bodies and the appropriate funding agencies.
	Further information: Jonathan Breckon [j.breckon@britac.ac.uk]

How much does higher education enhance the employability of graduates

Co-ordinator:	National Institute of Economic and Social Research and Institute of Education, University of London
Funder:	HEFCE
Timescale:	Report to be published in September 2002
Objectives:	To provide new evidence on: How HEIs are seeking to improve graduate employability The impact of these efforts on graduates' experiences in finding their first employment and on measures of job performance and career progress in graduates' early years of employment.
Methods:	Research visits to a total of 34 departments in five different subjects (including History) in eight different universities (4 post-1992, 4 pre-1992), involving interviews with teaching and careers staff. Analysis of First Destinations Survey data for all graduates in the year 2000 from the sample departments. Analysis of data from a new telephone survey of recent graduates in the subjects being investigated and a parallel survey of their immediate line managers.
Outcomes:	Report
	Further information: www.hefce.ac.uk

Programme for employability

Co-ordinator:	LTSN
Funder:	HEFCE
Timescale:	2002 – 2003
Objectives:	Eight Subject Centres (including English) have been awarded funding to develop activity related to employability.
Methods:	Initially, the activity will involve mapping good practice, which will be disseminated through workshops, conferences and publications.
Outcomes:	Employability strategy to encourage greater awareness among subject communities.
Further information:	www.ltsn.ac.uk

Enhancing student employability co-ordination team

Co-ordinator:	The Open University, University of Central England, Liverpool John Moores University, Association of Graduate Recruiters, Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services, National Union of Students and the Centre for Recording Achievement
Funder:	HEFCE
Timescale:	September 2002 – February 2005
Objectives:	To promote the integration of employment-relevant learning into HE provision. The Team's role will be to draw together the lessons learned from a range of recent employability-related initiatives, and to develop information, advice and guidance on range of issues.
Methods:	The team will work with the LTSN and other key partners to promote and disseminate this advice and guidance. The team will work through established networks and closely with the Generic Centre as its main channel for dialogue with the sector, as well as the eight subject centres selected for employability work (see above). Specifically, ESECT has five main roles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intelligence gathering • Evidence-based resource creation • Dissemination • Capacity-building and forming partnerships • Feedback to policy-makers.
Outcomes:	As above
Further information:	www.ltsn.ac.uk/generic

It has to be said that evidence for the effectiveness of such initiatives, as described in Appendix 4, is quite slim. A study being undertaken for HEFCE appears to suggest that the long-term effects on employability may be slight (see the project details above – ‘How much does higher education enhance the employability of graduates’). They may assist certain groups of students to obtain better employment and to obtain it more quickly than they might otherwise have done, but after a few years it is difficult to discern any noticeable advantages from these sorts of schemes (Mason and Williams, 2002).

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Appendix 1: The data

Introduction

The data presented below in Tables 1–4 have been derived from the Higher Education Statistics Agency’s published data of the First Destinations Survey (First Destinations of Students Leaving Higher Education Institutions, 2000/2001). The data presented in Tables 5–11 are derived from the findings of a recent international study of graduate employment carried out in 11 European countries and Japan. The UK part of the study was undertaken by the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information who produced a report for HEFCE on UK graduates in comparison with their European and Japanese counterparts – ‘The employment of UK graduates: comparisons with Europe and Japan’ (Brennan et al, 2001).

Table 1: First degree graduates’ main activity six months after graduation in 2000/2001 (selected subjects)

	Studying (%)	Employed (%)	Not available for employment (%)	Seeking employment or training (%)	Total (%)
English	28.1	58.1	6.6	7.2	100
History	28.8	54.8	8.5	7.9	100
Business & Administrative Studies	8.5	76.5	7.4	7.6	100
Sociology	16.0	68.6	7.4	8.0	100
Politics	21.3	61.9	7.8	9.0	100
Sociology & Politics	18.0	66.1	7.6	8.3	100
Biological Sciences	26.7	59.1	7.3	6.9	100
All graduates	18.4	67.7	6.4	7.5	100

Source: *HESA First Destinations Survey, 2000/2001*

Table 2: First degree graduates in UK paid full-time employment six months after graduation in 2000/2001, as a proportion of those in employment (selected subjects) (%)

English	75.1
History	77.7
Business & Administrative Studies	87.5
Sociology	79.0
Politics	81.3
Sociology & Politics	79.8
Biological Sciences	79.5
All graduates	82.4

Source: *HESA First Destinations Survey, 2000/2001*

Table 3: Graduate employment by industrial sectors (the four biggest recruiters highlighted for each subject) (%)

	English	History	Bus & Admin	Soc & Pol	Biological Sciences	All graduates
Business, consultancy & research (including IT-related) activities	18.0	19.6	24.8	16.2	17.2	19.6
Wholesale & retail trade	16.4	14.8	15.1	12.8	10.9	11.3
Manufacturing	11.0	6.3	10.1	5.5	9.3	8.8
Other community, social & personal service activities	10.2	8.9	5.3	6.0	9.0	7.0
Education	10.2	8.9	2.9	7.4	10.2	10.6
Financial activities	9.3	13.5	15.4	11.3	7.3	8.5
Public administration & defence/ social security	8.3	12.8	5.8	18.7	8.9	7.7
Health and social work	6.0	5.2	3.1	11.9	16.0	15.0
Transport, storage and communication	2.6	3.0	6.6	3.0	2.7	3.4
Hotels & restaurants	4.7	4.1	6.4	4.5	4.5	3.6

Source: *HESA First Destinations Survey, 2000/2001*
(NB excludes low percentage categories; therefore, totals do not add up to 100%.)

Table 4: Graduate occupations six months after graduation (only those in employment) (%)

	1. Managers and Administrators	2. Professional Occupations	3. Associate Professional and Technical occupations	1 + 2 + 3	4. Clerical and Secretarial occupations	Other	Total
English	19.5	5.7	15.9	41.1	32.6	26.3	100
History	21.1	8.9	12.6	42.6	33.0	24.3	100
Business & Administrative Studies	35.6	13.8	11.2	60.6	24.4	15.1	100
Sociology	20.2	11.0	15.7	46.9	26.0	27.1	100
Politics	25.3	7.2	15.3	47.8	30.9	21.3	100
Sociology & Politics	22.0	9.7	15.6	47.2	27.7	25.1	100
Biological Sciences	14.4	20.8	19.7	54.9	20.6	24.6	100
All graduates	17.0	26.6	21.6	65.1	17.3	17.5	100

Source: *HESA First Destinations Survey, 2000/2001*

Table 5: Transition into employment

	Averages		Percentages	
	Number of months passed between graduation and first job	Number of months spent on job-search	Spent some time unemployed	Studied for a further qualification undertaken
English (79)	8.9	3.9	9	49
English-related (61)	8.5	4.6	11	36
History (114)	8.5	5.5	20	40
Biological Sciences (210)	10.1	4.5	11	50
Sociology & Politics (87)	9.9	5.9	7	25
Business & Administrative Studies (385)	5.7	4.4	5	13
Humanities & Languages (432)	8.1	4.5	13	40
All graduates (3,221)	7.2	4.6	9	27
Source: <i>CHERI data</i>				

Table 6: Further studies (degree studies)

	Studied for any further qualification undertaken (%)	Studied for a Masters degree (%)	Studied for a Postgraduate Certificate or Diploma (%)	Studied for a Diploma (%)
English	49	20	38	1
English-related	36	18	19	5
History	40	17	23	7
Biological Sciences	50	26	13	19
Sociology & Politics	25	10	16	2
Business & Administrative Studies	13	5	7	0
Humanities & Languages	40	17	24	4
All graduates	27	11	14	4
Source: <i>CHERI data</i>				

Table 7: Graduate labour market activity three and a half years after graduation (%)

	Employed	Self-employed	Not employed, seeking employment	Professional training	Advanced academic study	Child rearing, family care	Other	Total
English	84	2	2	1	7	3	0	100
English-related	70	6	3	2	8	9	3	100
History	80	2	2	4	11	2	0	100
Biological Sciences	72	4	2	4	15	2	1	100
Sociology & Politics	79	4	3	4	5	3	4	100
Business & Administrative Studies	90	3	2	1	2	1	0	100
Humanities & Languages	79	3	2	3	9	3	1	100
All graduates	83	4	3	2	6	2	1	100

Source: *CHERI data*

Table 8: Graduate occupations three and a half years after graduation (only those in employment) (%)

	Legislators, senior officials and managers	Professionals	Technicians and associate professionals	1+2+3	Clerks	Other	Total
English	20	64	6	89	6	5	100
English-related	24	34	6	64	28	9	100
History	24	43	6	73	23	4	100
Biological Sciences	15	51	28	94	3	3	100
Sociology & Politics	31	44	13	87	6	6	100
Business & Administrative Studies	46	34	9	89	6	4	100
Humanities & Languages	26	47	7	81	14	5	100
All graduates	22	52	15	89	6	5	100

Source: *CHERI data*

Table 9: Selected characteristics of graduate jobs three and a half years after graduation (only those in employment)

	In full-time job (%)	In a graduate job (%)	Does not feel overqualified for the job (%)	Yearly income from major job before tax. Thousand pounds ¹⁸
English	95	66	66	15.71
English-related	89	42	53	17.88
History	91	56	63	16.35
Biological Sciences	89	76	74	17.81
Sociology & Politics	97	46	56	20.45
Business & Administrative Studies	96	74	69	21.33
Humanities & Languages	93	60	64	17.18
All graduates	94	71	72	20.35

Source: *CHERI data*

Table 10: Economic sector of graduate employment three and a half years after graduation (only those in employment) (%)

	Public employer	Non-profit organisation	Private employer	Self employed	Other	Total
English	45	12	42	1	0	100
English-related	50	2	44	4	0	100
History	31	5	60	3	1	100
Biological Sciences	38	14	41	3	4	100
Sociology & Politics	30	14	55		2	100
Business & Administrative Studies	19	5	71	4	1	100
Humanities & Languages	35	8	53	3	1	100
All graduates	35	6	53	4	2	100

Source: *CHERI data*

¹⁸ To compare like with like, only incomes from full-time jobs are included.

Table 11: Job-satisfaction (percentage of those choosing 4 or 5 from a 5-point scale, 5 indicating the most positive view)

	Satisfied with current employment situation	Current work better than expected
English	46	19
English-related	63	43
History	38	36
Biological Sciences	59	40
Sociology & Politics	43	27
Business & Administrative Studies	55	38
Humanities & Languages	46	30
All graduates	58	37

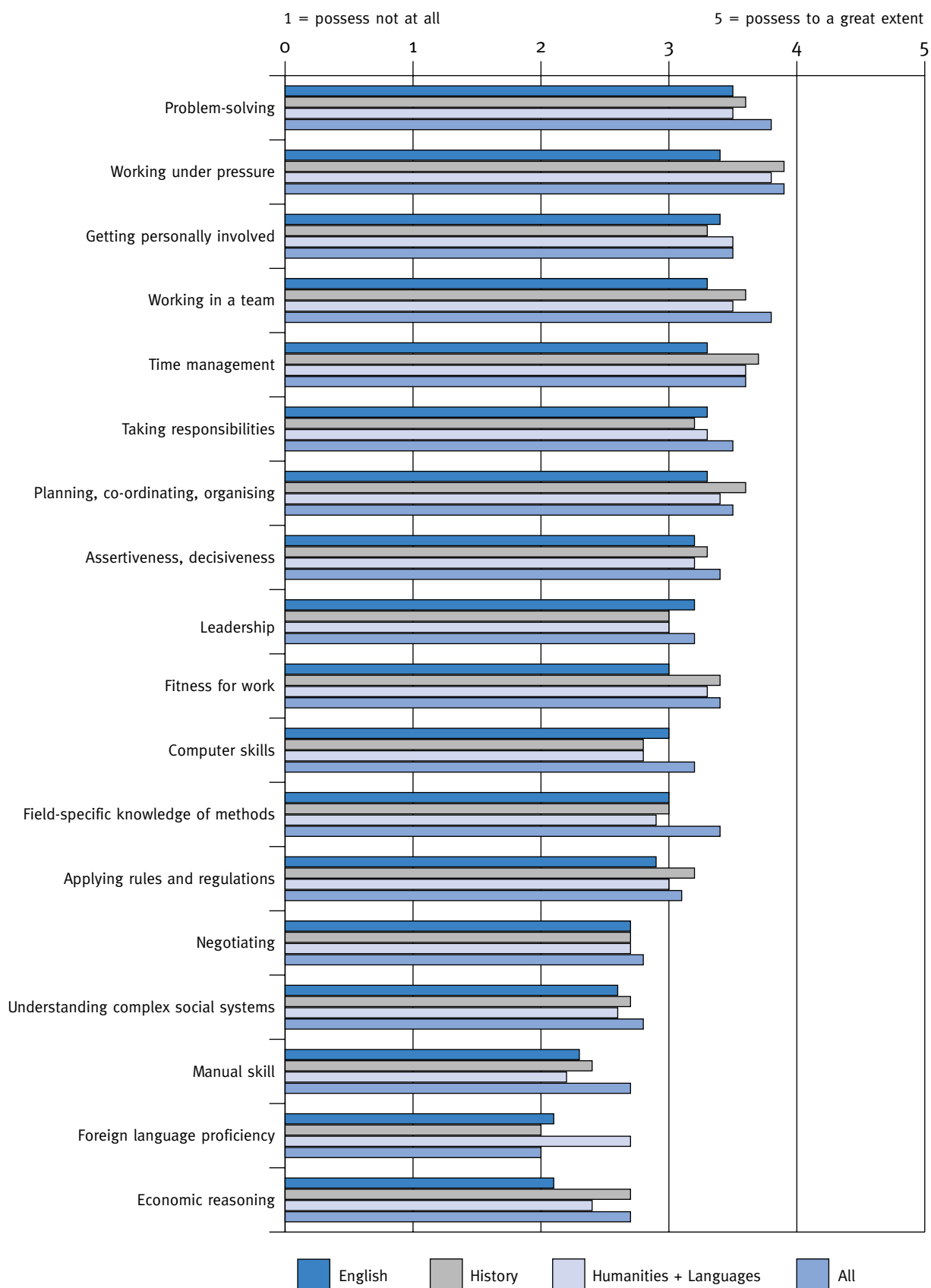
Source: *CHERI data*

Appendix 2: Graduates' self-reported skills and competences

Introduction

The data presented below are derived from the findings of a recent international study of graduate employment carried out in 11 European countries and Japan. The UK part of the study was undertaken by the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information who produced a report for HEFCE on UK graduates in comparison with their European and Japanese counterparts – ‘The employment of UK graduates: comparisons with Europe and Japan’ (Brennan et al, 2001). In particular, an analysis was undertaken of graduates’ perceptions of the skills they possessed at the time of their graduation. The study asked respondees to indicate on a 5-point scale the level to which they had possessed various skills and competences at the time of their graduation. Point 5 on this scale meant ‘to a great extent’ and 1 indicated the response ‘not at all’.

Chart 1b: Self-reported skills and competences. English graduates and other selected groups. Continued.



Appendix 3: Graduate employability projects in English departments

Introduction

The three projects listed below result from a search undertaken to identify initiatives and projects being conducted in English departments that respond to the employability agenda (see Section 5 of this report).

English in the workplace

Co-ordinator: De Montfort University and the University of Loughborough with Cardiff University, University of Gloucestershire and University of Newcastle upon Tyne

Funder: English Subject Centre

Timescale: January – September 2002

Objectives: To support the continuing development of responsive teaching and learning in English.
To raise general awareness of the employment prospects of English students.
To indicate ways in which the English curriculum can be shaped to meet graduate employment needs and student expectations.
To bridge the gap between university English and graduate career opportunities.

Methods: The project will support the continuing development of teaching and learning in English Studies that is demonstrably responsive to student needs and to ensure that the student learning experience includes a range of personal and key skills that are appropriate for employment. The project will combine the results of a survey of English graduates from De Montfort and Loughborough universities with a pioneering course at De Montfort, which allows students to understand how English curriculum programmes can be put to use within an employment context.

Outcomes: An analysis of the relationship between curriculum, student expectations and employment of English graduates.
Recommendations on how the curriculum can be more explicit in meeting students' career needs.
A published report circulated to university English Departments.
A conference to discuss issues generated by the project.
The production of leaflets to be used in local schools providing answers to the question: 'why do an English degree?'
An article in the THES.

Further information: www.english.ltsn.ac.uk

The dissemination of Speak-Write research and materials

Co-ordinator:	Anglia Polytechnic University
Funder:	English Subject Centre
Timescale:	January 2002 – January 2003
Objectives:	<p>The HEFCE-funded Speak-Write project (FDTL Phase 1) was established in the English department of Anglia Polytechnic University in 1997, as a response to concerns of academics and employers that standards of oral and written English were in decline. The project aim was to promote the acquisition of advanced written and oral communication skills among first year undergraduates in English through research into practice, design of teaching materials and their dissemination. The project was extended to provide a consultancy service to English departments.</p> <p>The aim of this current project is to disseminate the original materials, broadcast new research and trial developing materials.</p>
Methods:	<p>Copies of the report on graduate and employer perceptions of the value of humanities degrees in the workplace will be circulated to every English department in the UK.</p> <p>The consultancy service for existing Speak-Write materials to English departments will be resumed.</p> <p>New materials will be trialled in small local businesses and also piloted in English departments.</p>
Outcomes:	As above
Further information:	<p>www.ncteam.ac.uk/projects/fdtl/fdtl1 www.english.ltsn.ac.uk www.apu.ac.uk/english/speakwrite</p>

Our students in the workforce 18 months and three years after graduation; how did we do – and can we do better?

Co-ordinator:	University College Northampton with Brunel University and Anglia Polytechnic University
Funder:	HEFCE Fund for Development of Good Management Practice
Timescale:	To be completed December 2003
Objectives:	<p>To develop a system of obtaining feedback from students 18 months and three years after graduation to:</p> <p>Help plan teaching and student support at programme, department and institutional level.</p> <p>Enhance accountability and value for money by linking directly with internal and external quality management and quality assurance processes.</p> <p>Provide reliable information about employment and career paths in relation to expected programme learning outcomes.</p> <p>Analyse patterns of employment in relation to graduate jobs and graduate skills for students from specific programme areas.</p> <p>Analyse the skills that students use in their employment - and the extent that programmes of study help develop such skills.</p> <p>Be consistent and transferable across HEIs, and thereby allow comparisons between institutions.</p> <p>Provide a sustainable method for obtaining management information about recent graduates.</p> <p>Enhance collaborative working between the partners.</p>
Methods:	<p>A pilot will test whether it is possible to track 1998 and 2000 graduates and follow-up their career since leaving, through questionnaire. Lessons learned from the pilot will be incorporated in a second survey of graduates in November 2002. Questions asked will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How closely does your job relate to your major area of study? • How well did your university education prepare you for this job? <p>Questions will also be asked about skills and knowledge on leaving university compared with those required to carry out their current employment. The information collected will be fed back into curriculum development. The subject areas involved are Computing, Earth Sciences, English, Geography, History, Law and Sociology.</p>
Outcomes:	As above
Further information:	<p>www.hefce.ac.uk</p> <p>www.northampton.ac.uk/admin/oip/projects/index.html</p>

Appendix 4: Graduate employability projects in cognate areas

The initiatives outlined below have been divided into i) on-going or recently completed projects and ii) completed projects. The search for these initiatives covered a number of well known and well established externally-funded programmes. These include the following.

- Innovations Fund (funded by the DfES). Among other things, this fund exists to improve links between higher education and employers. The Fund is co-ordinated by the Innovations Team on behalf of HEFCE.
- Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (FDTL) is funded by HEFCE along with the Teaching and Learning Technology Programme (TLTP). The fund was established in 1995 and is now in Phase 4. Both FDTL and TLTP are co-ordinated by the National Co-ordination Team of the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund.
- A number of completed projects have been included which the former Department for Education and Employment funded between 1998 and 2000 under its Higher Education and Employment Development Fund. The projects covered eight main themes related to the education and employment agenda. The ones listed in the Appendix are part of the 'key skills in higher education' theme. All the projects under all eight themes are briefly described in a special issue of the Higher Education Digest (available to view on the DfEE website). In addition, the aim of a project – Bridging the Gap – funded by the Innovations Fund mentioned above is to enhance the dissemination of these DfEE projects.

Other sources for our search included HEFCE, UUK, LTSN generic and subject centres, the British Academy and the Council of University Deans of Arts and Humanities.

On-going or recently completed projects:

On-going or recently completed projects:

Skills plus: employability in higher education

Co-ordinator:	Open University, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester University, Liverpool John Moores University, North-West Development Agency
Funder:	HEFCE/DfES Innovations Fund
Timescale:	August 2000 – September 2002
Objectives:	To work with subject departments in higher education on curriculum design so that their undergraduate programmes help students to learn well and enhance their employability in the process. To conduct research to improve understanding of what graduate employability means in the workplace.
Methods:	As above
Outcomes:	Numerous publications
Further information:	www.open.ac.uk/vqportal/Skills-Plus/home.htm

Employability and the media studies curriculum

Co-ordinator:	University of Sunderland
Funder:	HEFCE Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (Phase 3)
Timescale:	2000 –
Objectives:	To identify those elements of the Media Studies curriculum which enhance graduate employability, and the ways in which these elements can be effectively developed.
Methods:	The project will identify the matrix of skills which can be defined as enhancing employability of Media Studies graduates and those elements of the curriculum and pedagogic practice which deliver these skills.
Outcomes:	The project will produce criteria for and models of good practice in the design, content and organisation of such elements within a broad-based undergraduate Media-Studies curriculum, and ensure that these are widely disseminated.
Further information:	www.ncteam.ac.uk/projects/fdtl/fdtl3

Skills for learning

Co-ordinator:	Leeds Metropolitan University
Funder:	Internally resourced
Timescale:	1996 - on-going
Objectives:	To develop a coherent university-wide approach to the development of skills across all levels of study, including employability skills.
Methods:	A cross-institutional approach has been taken, which involved all academic provision areas.
Outcomes:	A generic resource of study skills materials has been produced for use by both staff and students in printed and web-based form. The resources can be used by academic staff in the delivery of key skills within the curriculum, and by students to browse and use independently at their point of need.
Further information:	Viv Anderson [V.Anderson@lmu.ac.uk]

Employer Mentoring Scheme

Co-ordinator:	Anglia Polytechnic University
Funder:	Internally resourced
Timescale:	2001 - on-going
Objectives:	To introduce second year students to local employers who will help them to develop relevant skills and enhance their employability. Each pair will work on issues that meet the needs of the individual mentee. (At present the scheme has been run as a pilot at one of the University's campuses, although it is to be expanded in the future.)
Methods:	Mentors are trained over two days to familiarise them with the scheme and course provision at APU. Potential mentees are interviewed to establish their needs and what can be met from within the scheme. Successful mentees are trained to enable them to make the most of the scheme. Mentors and mentees meet at an introductory session and then again on at least six occasions to help develop students' employability skills.
Outcomes:	Students are enabled to evaluate their own skills and development needs assisted by an experienced employee who will then use their own experiences and resources to motivate and facilitate the student's development.
Further information:	www.apu.ac.uk/careers/essex/mentoring.htm

Widening access to experience works

Co-ordinator:	University of Newcastle upon Tyne
Funder:	HEFCE/DfES Innovations Fund
Timescale:	2000 – 2002
Objectives:	To enhance the success of a targeted group of students in preparing for and making the transition into employment using work-related learning as its central strategy. The emphasis of the project was to support departments involved in the widening participation agenda in the development of work-related learning as well as continuing to broker work experience opportunities to all students.
Methods:	The University’s Careers Service worked in partnership with academics and other stakeholders to focus on curriculum-based interventions. The approach taken was to offer internal consultancy to support the implementation of the institutional learning and teaching strategy.
Outcomes:	Work was undertaken with 28 departments within the University, including English Literary and Linguistic Studies.
Further information:	www.careers.ncl.ac.uk/academics www.innovations.ac.uk

Marketing graduates' skills

Co-ordinator:	London School of Economics
Funder:	HEFCE/DfES Innovations Fund
Timescale:	To be completed in October 2002
Objectives:	<p>To pioneer a model of skills development that is flexible enough to improve the prospects of students entering any field of graduate employment and that is simple enough and robust enough to fit into typical university course structures and methods. Specifically the objectives were:</p> <p>To improve practical skills development in at least one course at LSE and one at Oxford Brookes involving at least 300 students</p> <p>To audit provision</p> <p>To review the transition to employment of no fewer than 30 students in order to identify key benchmarks</p> <p>To evaluate the impact of changes on the employability of students</p> <p>To define clear guidelines for good practice</p> <p>To publish case studies describing good practice</p> <p>To communicate and disseminate the learning arising.</p>
Methods:	<p>Practical course development was undertaken through workshops focusing on group projects and teamwork development. The practice of building a partnership relationship with teachers, aligning academic and skills goals and introducing/developing self- and peer-assessment and reflective reports was tested out.</p> <p>A good practice guide will be developed to bring together the materials used during the project.</p> <p>Case studies on benefits, methods and assessing and accrediting skills development will be produced to draw on experience and research and evaluation undertaken during the project.</p> <p>The development of a network of individuals from a wide range of institutions and functions was established to help the project achieve its objectives.</p>
Outcomes:	As above
Further information:	www.innovations.ac.uk

Key skills making connections

Co-ordinator:	Open University
Funder:	HEFCE/DfES Innovations Fund
Timescale:	To be completed in October 2002
Objectives:	To make the connections between learning in HE and application in employment contexts (and vice versa) through awareness, development and use of higher level key skills.
Methods:	<p>Develop methods, strategies and support materials for implementing and evaluating higher level key skills development in business and industry.</p> <p>Identify the meta-skills and other features that facilitate transfer of key skills in application from HE to employment contexts and vice versa.</p> <p>Create a database of real work-based case studies and other resources to illustrate the application of higher level key skills in a range of employment contexts/job roles.</p> <p>Explore with and enable companies to integrate higher level skills development within their HRD and appraisal strategies.</p> <p>Help individuals within companies identify the higher level skills achieved through work activities and how these can be adapted/applied to HE learning for continuing professional development or changes in job role/career.</p> <p>Develop ICT based delivery and assessment methods and systems to support higher level key skills development.</p>
Outcomes:	<p>Materials and web-based resources to support higher level key skills development.</p> <p>An open-access electronic support and assessment system for higher level key skills.</p> <p>A research report on factors which facilitate and inhibit skills transfer.</p> <p>A database of case studies of higher level skills application in a variety of job roles.</p> <p>Models for incorporating higher level key skills within HRD strategies and a network of companies who are doing this.</p> <p>Models for incorporating higher level key skills within the IPD and CPD strategies of at least two professional bodies.</p>
Further information:	www.innovations.ac.uk

What next?

Co-ordinator:	University of Durham
Funder:	HEFCE/DfES Innovations Fund
Timescale:	2000 – 2002
Objectives:	To encourage undergraduates to start career planning from their first year and provide the opportunity for students to work alongside employers to develop the skills they will need to succeed in the workplace.
Methods:	The project consists of a series of generic skills workshops, employer-led skills workshops, employer-led specific activities, on-line competency-based skills development packages and work experience opportunities.
Outcomes:	As above
Further information:	www.innovations.ac.uk

Developing learning organisations

Co-ordinator:	Risk Management Alternatives
Funder:	HEFCE/DfES Innovations Fund
Timescale:	2000 – 2002
Objectives:	To change the way organisations view learning and to encourage collaboration between higher education and business.
Methods:	Developing a model for co-operation between academic practitioners and employers in a range of sectors (SMEs in particular). Supporting cultures of learning within and between employing organisations. Enhancing the employability of graduates in arts and humanities disciplines. Identifying and bridging perceived gaps between employer needs and the student learning experience.
Outcomes:	As above
Further information:	www.innovations.ac.uk

Developing, assessing and recording student skills

Co-ordinator:	University of Nottingham
Funder:	HEFCE/DfES Innovations Fund
Timescale:	To be completed Autumn 2002
Objectives:	<p>To facilitate change strategies through the HEFCE Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) subject centres. The objectives are to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise knowledge of key skills and awareness of personal key skills and other competences among higher education staff, students, graduates and employers • Develop effective methods of dissemination of information and practical experience regarding key skills within HE, using experience gained by the team from previous projects • Work collaboratively with LTSN subject centres to develop effective staff development activities related to developing and recording student skills • Develop materials to help staff in subject areas to access relevant support for developing new approaches to promoting and recording student skills • Maintain and enhance network links with related key skills and training websites, including those associated with other ‘innovations’-funded projects.
Methods:	<p>Skills workshops National conference Consultancy support Development of support materials CD-ROM for LTSN centres covering information on good practice</p>
Outcomes:	A set of material for use in LTSN Subject Centres
Further information:	<p>www.innovations.ac.uk www.nottingham.ac.uk/education/cdell</p>

Postgraduate careers survey

Co-ordinator:	Council of University Deans of Arts and Humanities
Funder:	CUDAH in partnership with Arts & Humanities Research Board, Council for Industry and Higher Education and LTSN Arts and Humanities subject centres
Timescale:	March – December 2002
Objectives:	Little is known about the career destinations of postgraduates who have undertaken doctoral study in the arts and humanities subjects, and one of the main aims of this project is to evaluate the skills that postgraduates have developed during their doctoral research and their relevance to current employment.
Methods:	To evaluate the skills that postgraduates (those who have completed doctoral study since 1997) have developed during their doctoral research and their relevance to current employment, the extent to which the expectations of doctoral students match eventual career destinations.
Outcomes:	The information from the project will benefit future research students and employers. It will form the basis of a report to be published in December 2002.
Further information:	Judy Simons [jsimons@dmu.ac.uk]

Graduate skills programme

Co-ordinator:	Research Councils' Graduate Schools Programme
Funder:	Research Councils and the Arts & Humanities Research Board
Timescale:	Ongoing
Objectives:	The GSP's aim is to be the main provider of personal and careers skills training to postgraduate students and to act as a resource centre for HEIs.
Methods:	Resources provided include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A programme of national courses for postgraduates • National workshops for postgraduate personal skills training practitioners in universities • Materials development (case studies, skills sessions and careers management sessions) • Skills development for engineers • Collaborative programmes with institutions to develop courses specifically designed to meet local needs.
Outcomes:	As above
Further information:	www.gradschools.ac.uk

Completed projects:

Employability and diversity

Co-ordinator:	Universities UK and Higher Education Careers Services Unit
Funder:	UUK/CSU
Timescale:	Report published July 2002
Objectives:	To explore the issues arising from enhancing employability for diversity.
Methods:	The project summarised research that analysed the ways higher education is addressing employability. The report includes a number of case studies of initiatives that illustrate the variety of ways employability is being enhanced.
Outcomes:	Report
Further information:	www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/employability

Salford key skills

Co-ordinator:	University of Salford
Funder:	Department for Education and Employment
Timescale:	1998 – 2000
Objectives:	To design and implement a strategic and transferable, institution-wide model of undergraduate key skills development. The model addressed development, delivery and accreditation of key skills.
Methods:	Discipline-based projects were established to include key skills in the curriculum (and one of these was in Politics and Contemporary History). Cross-institution groups were established to focus on the broader issues relating to key skills. A structured staff development programme was established. A system was developed to diagnose and monitor student skill development. An employer survey, focussing on SMEs, was undertaken to identify their key skill requirements.
Outcomes:	Key skills were embedded in the curriculum at discipline level through mapping, curriculum review and development, implementation, and monitoring and review.
Further information:	www.dfec.gov.uk/heqe/projsintro.htm#1998

Embedding key skills within a traditional university

Co-ordinator:	University of Nottingham
Funder:	Department for Education and Employment
Timescale:	1998 – 2000
Objectives:	To develop and embed key skills within a range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses at the University. It also aimed to establish means whereby the assessment and monitoring of key skill development could be recorded within existing institutional, personal and academic recording systems.
Methods:	The project involved eight schools and departments, including the School of English Studies. Within each department, there was a departmental leader who was a member of the lecturing staff, temporarily seconded to the project, and whose role was to monitor and co-ordinate key skills development in their department. The project involved four stages: preparation, implementation, dissemination and evaluation.
Outcomes:	Individually-tailored pilots of approaches to key skill implementation within eight departments which will be useful for others to adapt. The development of discipline-specific key skills material. An increased awareness among the staff involved about the challenges involved in implementing key skills into the curriculum and how best to achieve implementation. An increased awareness among the students involved about the need to develop their key skills and means to do so.
Further information:	www.dfes.gov.uk/heqe/projsintro.htm#1998

Key skills in higher education: The 'Central Lancashire key skills contract'

Co-ordinator:	University of Central Lancashire
Funder:	Department for Education and Employment
Timescale:	1998 – 2000
Objectives:	To develop an institutional key skills implementation strategy, based on the experience of 'trials' carried out in a range of university departments (including Cultural Studies and Languages and International Studies).
Methods:	The 'trials' involved <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing appropriate systems and support so that undergraduates could monitor their key skills development throughout their degree • Surveying existing key skills provision in the curriculum and assessing in which areas it could be increased • Innovations in teaching and learning • Innovations in formative and summative assessment strategies.
Outcomes:	The project saw the widening of key skills development from being the concern of a small group of enthusiasts to a wider range of staff. The success of the wider interest depended on local managerial support and the centrality of the work on key skills to departmental priorities.
Further information:	www.dfce.gov.uk/heqe/projsintro.htm#1998

Training research students for employability

Co-ordinator:	Universities of Leeds, Sheffield and York
Funder:	Department for Education and Employment
Timescale:	1998 – 2000
Objectives:	To develop models of good practice for assisting research students to gain skills which would enhance their employability.
Methods:	The project entailed the development of processes, materials and courses. It involved staff developers, careers guidance staff, academic staff, and research students. The project operated in the following ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal profiles completed by more than 570 research students • Interpersonal skills schools to develop team working skills, develop students' awareness of their working style, and enhance career management skills • Action planning workshops attended by over 300 research students • A work shadowing scheme for research students to shadow senior employees within organisations outside the academic sector • Support for research supervisors.
Outcomes:	The project has contributed towards developing good practice, illuminating the experiences of research students and generating new processes and materials that can be adopted and adapted by others in the sector.
Further information:	www.dfce.gov.uk/heqe/projsintro.htm#1998

Student self-development and key skills acquisition

Co-ordinator:	University of Bradford
Funder:	Department for Education and Employment
Timescale:	1998 – 2000
Objectives:	To address the need for more active provision of student self-development opportunities through extra curricular activities, and key skills acquisition through curriculum development.
Methods:	The approach adopted was to focus on embedding key skills in the curricula of six academic departments (including the Department of Interdisciplinary Human Studies) and to raise awareness of the importance of self-reflective learning.
Outcomes:	The development of relevant key skills has been embedded in the curriculum through the revision of modules and a directory of opportunities has been provided to encourage students to participate in extra-curricular activities. The project has created a group of University staff with expertise in key skills issues. It achieved its objectives through setting up an effective project management framework that extended into each of the six participating departments.
Further information:	www.dfec.gov.uk/heqe/projsintro.htm#1998

Teamwork for education and employment network in the Arts

Co-ordinator:	University of Newcastle
Funder:	Department of Education and Employment
Timescale:	1998 – 2000
Objectives:	To develop a transferable teaching and learning strategy capable of meeting, within an academic framework, specified employment needs of students studying a non-vocational subject discipline. In addition, the project aimed to disseminate, through a discipline network, teaching and learning strategies that would enhance the employability of graduates.
Methods:	The project involved introducing academically and occupationally validated vocational elements into non-vocational programmes. The project also encouraged the development of such specific skills as team-working, commercial acumen and occupational awareness. The main methodology that was adopted during the project was a case study approach. Through this approach the project was able to (i) develop a range of modules and approaches which were implemented in four departments, and (ii) develop an extra-curricular programme. The case studies were carried out with employers in four subjects (modern languages, archaeology, museum studies and music).
Outcomes:	Modules have been developed, the skills of students have been enhanced, the project findings have been disseminated and a website has been developed.
Further information:	www.dfec.gov.uk/heqe/projsintro.htm#1998

TransLang

Co-ordinator:	University of Central Lancashire
Funder:	HEFCE Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (Phase 2)
Timescale:	1997 – 2000
Objectives:	To improve practice in teaching, learning and assessment in modern languages in HE institutions by enhancing the role that can be played by transferable skills in programmes of language study for non-specialists. This role has been found to apply equally well to specialists and is applicable across disciplines.
Methods:	The project involved eight universities (Anglia Polytechnic, Staffordshire, Liverpool John Moores, Luton, Newcastle, Oxford Brookes, Central Lancashire and Southampton Institute) to create materials and techniques for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessing skills elements of language tasks • Developing skills associated with learner autonomy • Designing modules incorporating skills elements.
Outcomes:	Guide to Transferable Skills in Non-specialist Language Learning TransLang 'Language Challenge' Survey of Non-specialist Language Provision in the UK' Consultancy activities Refereed articles in journals and conference proceedings.
Further information:	www.ncteam.ac.uk/projects/fdtl/fdtl2

Higher education and graduate employment in Europe

Co-ordinator:	Centre for Research on Higher Education and Work, University of Kassel, Germany (with Centre for Higher Education Research and Information)
Funder:	European Commission's Targeted Socio Economic Research programme
Timescale:	1997 – 2000
Objectives:	To provide a comparative account of employment and work of graduates from institutions of higher education in Europe.
Methods:	The project involved a questionnaire survey of representative samples of graduates (about 3,500 in each country) addressing their study experiences and competences acquired; their employment, work and careers since graduation; the links they perceive between education and work. The survey was supplemented by interviews to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationships between higher education and work.
Outcomes:	The project co-ordinators presented a report to the EC on the project findings at the end of 2000. The UK survey was written by CHERI and published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England – 'The employment of UK graduates: comparisons with Europe and Japan' (report 01/38).
Further information:	www.open.ac.uk/cheri www.hefce.ac.uk

Appendix 5: Information provided by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) on Programme Specifications and Benchmark Statements

Programme Specifications

Specifically,

‘Programme specifications are one of a number of ways in which higher education providers are able to describe the intended outcomes of learning. Subject benchmark statements represent the general expectations about the standards of achievement and general attributes to be expected of a graduate in a given subject area.’¹⁹

As well as students and prospective students, the QAA guidelines perceive users of programme specifications to be employers, professional and statutory regulatory bodies, institutions and teaching teams, academic reviewers and external examiners, and as a basis for gaining feedback from students and recent graduates.

The QAA suggests that programme specifications should contain certain information; this includes the following:

- Aims of the programme
- Relevant subject benchmark statement (and other reference points to inform programme outcomes)
- Teaching, learning and assessment strategies
- Programme structures and requirements

How this information is presented to students and potential students, and other users is not prescribed in the guidelines.

Benchmark Statements

According to the QAA, benchmark statements should do three things:

- Describe the nature and characteristics of programmes in a specific subject
- Represent general expectations about the standards of an award at a given level
- Articulate the attributes and capabilities that those possessing such qualifications should be able to demonstrate.

They also have a number of purposes:

- They provide general guidance for articulating learning outcomes of programmes
- They provide support to institutions in pursuit of internal quality assurance
- They are a source of information for the purposes of academic review.

Benchmark statements have been produced for 47 subjects in consultation with the subject community and often much wider. Some statements (including English) refer to the difficulty of the task, made harder by the proliferation of combined and modular structures and the overlap between disciplinary boundaries. Many emphasise that benchmark statements should not prescribe or restrict what is or will be taught, and that diversity and growth of subjects must be preserved.

¹⁹ Extract taken from QAA document ‘Guidelines for preparing programme specifications’ (June 2000, p3).

Appendix 6: A selection of other sources of evidence-based information on graduates' labour market activity

Below is a selection of empirical research publications on graduate employment in the UK from recent years. Some are based on large-scale surveys of samples of graduates; in others data from either the HESA FDS or the Labour Force survey have been analysed and interpreted.

With the exception of the Belfield et al study, the listed reports do not distinguish English graduates but include them in a broader category (typically Languages or Humanities graduates). Nevertheless, the insight these studies provide into the employment characteristics of these broader graduate groups is a valuable one when the employment prospects of English graduates are to be understood.

Belfield C R, A Bullock, A N Chevalier, A Fielding, W S Siebert, H R Thomas (1997), *Mapping the careers of highly qualified workers*, University of Birmingham

Careers Services Unit (2002), *What do graduates do?*, Manchester: CSU

Careers Services Unit (2002), *Graduate labour market trends*, Summer 2002, Manchester: CSU

Connor H et al (1997), *What do graduates do next?*, Institute of Employment Studies Report 343

Connor H and E Pollard (1996), *What do graduates really do?*, Institute for Employment Studies Report 208

Elias P (1999), *Moving on: graduates careers three years after graduation*, Department for Education and Employment, Institute for Employment Research, Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services and Higher Education Careers Service Unit (CSU)

Higher Education Funding Council for England (2001), *Indicators of employment*, Bristol: HEFCE (01/21)

Pearson et al (2000), *The IES annual graduate review 2000: a diverse and fragmented labour market*, Institute for Employment Studies Report 367



The English Subject Centre supports all aspects of the teaching and learning of English in higher education in the United Kingdom. It is part of the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) www.ltsn.ac.uk.

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