Wider perspectives and more options for English Language and Linguistics students

The development of employability and key skills and an overview of the destinations of graduates

A report for the Subject Centre of Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies (Higher Education Academy)

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Summary

Understanding graduate employability is of vital importance for Higher Education. This is particularly important for the Humanities, as students from these areas are less often in employment six months after graduation than students from more vocational degrees. This study reports on the employability of Linguistics and English Language students, as little is known about the career paths of this particular group of Humanities students. In order to fill this gap, this report offers an analysis of the statistics of the Destinations of Leavers of Higher Education (DLHE) in eleven institutions which offer Linguistics or English Language, an overview of good practice in these institutions with respect to the support given to students wishing to develop their employability skills, as well as a summary of focus group discussions and interviews with current students and graduates about their skills and work experience. On the basis of these analyses, we make some recommendations about the ways in which institutions can help English Language or Linguistics students to prepare for the world of work.

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Introduction

Understanding graduate employability is a core key issue for Higher Education, in particular in the current economic situation where finding jobs is difficult for everyone, including graduates. Final year students are very concerned about their chances on the job market. According to a survey among 16,000 final year students (High Fliers Research Limited, 2010), students' confidence in the graduate employment market is now at its lowest for fifteen years, and only a third of the final year students are confident that they will find a graduate job after university. Analyses of the actual destinations of previous cohorts of graduates are available from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and these provide a less gloomy picture. Their most recent results show that 91% of graduates from the 2007-2008 cohort were in employment in the first year after graduation (HESA 2009). While this information is no doubt useful in that it gives a general indication of students' first destinations, the statistics do not offer detailed information regarding the differences in employment rates for different degree courses, as the results are grouped together in large subject areas. In addition, as it may take longer for graduates with less obviously vocational degrees to take up graduate level jobs (British Academy 2004: 55), the information collected in the first year after graduation may not give a good impression of the students' chances to secure graduate jobs.

As the HESA statistics show that students with degrees that are less directly oriented towards a particular career paths are at a disadvantage on the job market in comparison with students of vocational subjects such as Medicine or Law, it is very important for academic staff and career advisers in the Humanities, and last but not least the Humanities students themselves, to obtain more detailed information about the career paths followed by students in their areas. As the cost of higher education increases and debt levels are going up, students are likely to increasingly feel the need to focus on employability in their choice of a degree subject (see also Allan 2006). Fears of student debt and the job market may even deter some school leavers from going to university altogether. According to a recent report rising numbers of school leavers are applying directly to school-leavers entry schemes of graduate employers, without going to university (The Guardian, 13th August 2010).

Students are however not always aware of the range of options they have upon completing a degree in the Humanities. According to a British Academy report (2004), for example, a significant proportion of graduates in a wide range of subjects within the arts, humanities and social sciences enter careers in management. In these functions, graduates use a variety of generic skills rather than the subject-specific skills that they have obtained during their studies.

In order to throw more light on the career paths of Humanities graduates, different Subject Centres from the HE Academy commissioned two studies into the careers of Humanities students: the Allan report (2006) and the Croucher, Canning and Gawthorpe report (2007). Allan (2006) fills an important gap in our understanding of the longer term prospects of Humanities students by reporting on a series of in-depth interviews with Humanities graduates from the 1970s onwards. Croucher et al (2007) provide insight into the entrepreneurial capacity of Humanities graduates, and is based on interviews with graduates from a range of humanities subjects who are currently running their own businesses. The current study builds on those two studies, but specifically focuses on English Language and Linguistics students and graduates.

The main reasons for choosing these degree subjects as the focus point for this study is that most studies carried out so far include a wide range of subject areas that belong to the Humanities, but there is little information specifically about English Language or Linguistics in these reports. As the number of students who start these degrees across the UK is fairly small in comparison to those studying English Literature or other Humanities subjects, in most statistical overviews or reports information about English The current project aims at providing answers to the following three questions:

1. What are the first destinations of UK graduates of Linguistics or English Language?

2. How do universities help current Linguistics or English Language students to prepare for the world of work?

3. How do Linguistics or English Languages students and graduates evaluate the knowledge and skills they have obtained during their studies and what training or support do they recommend universities should provide for Linguistics students in preparing for the job market?

Information regarding the first destinations of graduates and examples of good practice in supporting students for the world of work were obtained from eleven universities in the UK that offer Linguistics or English Language as a single honours or a joint honours degree. In addition, we held focus group sessions with current students at the University of Manchester and UWE Bristol, which aimed at gathering student views on their job prospects and the ways in which their universities supported them for their future. Finally, we interviewed graduates from four universities (Manchester, Newcastle, Sussex and Westminster) to find out what career paths they had chosen and what knowledge and skills they considered to be important for the world of work.

In this report we will first define the notions employability and key skills (section 2). We then sketch the methodology of the study (section 3). The analyses of the destinations of the Linguistics and English Language graduates are reported in section 4, and section 5 offers a summary of good practice in developing key skills among students. In section 6 we present the results of the focus group sessions with current students and section 7 is devoted to the interviews with graduates. In the final section we present our conclusion and a number of recommendations.

The current small-scale study does not claim to be representative for all English Language or Linguistics degrees in the country. Our aim in this study is to provide some information about careers that graduates from these fields have chosen and key skills that students develop during their studies, which we hope can help staff to inform students about possible future career paths and prepare them for the world of work.

We do feel the need to point out that the Higher Education experience can and should never be exclusively about employability. As is clearly explained in the British Academy report (2004) an education in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences enhances the lives individuals and assists the formation of critical minds to bear on a wide range of crucial issues, resulting in a flourishing public culture, committed to respect for knowledge and intelligent debate. While it is important to bear this in mind, for reasons sketched above, it is crucially important for universities to take the employability agenda seriously.

Employability and key skills

In the current study we cannot discuss different views of employability in much detail, and need to rely on previous authors who have looked at a range of aspects of this. We agree with Yorke (2006: 7) who suggests employability is a complex, multi-faceted and dynamic concept, which refers to the capacity of a graduate to function in a job. For the purposes of the present study we adopt Yorke's (2006: 8) definition of employability:

> "a set of skills, understandings and personal attributes that make a graduate more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefit themselves, the community and the economy."

Importantly, Yorke notes that the HE experience is not a sufficient condition for enhanced employability. While obtaining a degree may facilitate the development of prerequisites appropriate to employment, it does not guarantee it. Rather employability derives from the ways in which the student learns from his or her experiences. Employability is also a dynamic concept, and not merely an attribute of graduates. Rather it should be seen in the context of lifelong learning: a graduate needs to continue (re) developing his/her employability throughout his/her working life. To explain the role of HE further, Yorke (2006: 11) uses the metaphor of a rocket powered aircraft:

> "Higher education can take them (=the students) so far, but then they have to deal with the challenges that employment throws up. The situation is a bit like a rocketpowered aircraft being lifted by a conventional one up into the stratosphere so that it can maximise its performance at altitude without a prohibitive expenditure of fuel to get there."

A first impression of the careers graduates go into can be obtained from the statistics about the Destinations of Leavers of Higher Education (DLHE statistics), which can be found on the Unistats webpages (http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/). As Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007: 3) note, an important issue is whether graduates are using the skills, knowledge and understanding gained in their degree in a 'graduate level job'. It has therefore become increasingly important to provide information about the percentage of the students who were able to secure graduate jobs (as opposed to non-graduate jobs), as this has become a Key Performance Indicator in HE. Providing a definition of a graduate job is however far from easy, not least because of changes in the job market, which have a significant impact on the demand for graduate skills and knowledge (Purcell and Elias 2004). In the framework of the current report it is not possible for us to elaborate on this further and the reader is referred to Purcell and Elias (2004) who offer a new classification of different kinds of graduate jobs.

In most studies into the subject, key skills are considered to be a central component of employability, even though researchers highlight a wide variety of skills, and group these in different ways. Often a distinction is made between subject-specific knowledge and skills on the one hand and generic, key or transferable skills on the other hand. It is the latter which are of particular interest to us in this study, because the range of jobs in which English Language or Linguistics students can make use of subject-specific skills is relatively limited. Indeed, analyses of advertisements for graduate vacancies show that around 50 percent of all graduate jobs do not specify a degree subject (British Academy 2004, § 136). For these jobs students will therefore need to rely on the generic, key or transferable skills they have acquired. Our aim in this study is to find out to what extent English Language and Linguistics students have acquired such skills. From now on we will use the term key skills to refer to this group of skills.

More evidence for the importance of key skills can be obtained from a Survey for the Institute of Directors, for which 500 directors were invited to give their views on the skills and qualities they considered to be most important in graduate employees. From among these the following came out as the top ten most important for graduates:

1. Honesty and integrity
2. Basic literacy skills
3. Basic oral communication skills (e.g. telephone skills)
4. Reliability
5. Being hard working and having a good work ethic
6. Numeracy skills
7. A positive, "can do" attitude
8. Punctuality
9. Ability to meet deadlines
10. Team working and co-operation skills

Source: Institute of Directors skills briefing: December 2007

In addition, the majority of graduate employers found what they called "employability skills" to be more important than the specific occupations, technical or academic knowledge that graduates might have acquired.

The most detailed description to date of the key skills that Linguistics students can obtain during their studies is given in Hudson (2003), who notes that students have the chance to develop a lot of important "life skills" as a by-product of the teaching of Linguistics (http://www.llas.ac.uk/resources/gpg/2568). In Hudson's view, Linguistics is a particularly good subject to learn these skills, which include general communication skills, hard thinking about difficult issues, the ability to evaluate explanations critically, self-reflection, as well as some important attitudes to one's environment, such as openness and tolerance. Importantly, Hudson points out that "any skill is more likely to develop at all if it is conscious, and skills are more likely to be transferable if the learner is aware of them." Clearly there is a role for tutors here to ensure students become more aware of the skills they are acquiring.

The importance of key skills is also highlighted in the Benchmark statements for Linguistics and English (QAA), which mention, for example, abstracting and synthesising information, constructing and managing an argument, thinking and judging independently, advanced literacy and numeracy, competence in the planning and execution of essays and project-work; information-technology skills such as word-processing, and the ability to access electronic data; time-management and organisational skills, as shown by the ability to plan and present conclusions effectively.

On the websites of many of the institutions that participated in the current study similar points are made. On the careers advice website of the University of Cardiff, for example, it is claimed that "perhaps the major strength of all English and Communications based degrees is communication skills both in speech and writing." Other skills students practise are to "organise your workload, lead and participate in discussions, think critically and develop opinions, persuade others of your point of view, convey meaning precisely and present ideas and information" (see http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/carsv-old/forstudgrad/careersadvice/whatdegree/index.html).

In the current study we have used the list of key skills that was compiled for the interviews with Humanities graduates in the Allan (2006) report, as this list worked well with the group that was investigated and using the same list will enable us to build on the conclusions of this report.

Method

The sample of eleven universities on which this study is based was obtained by emailing the twelve key contacts for Linguistics in the UK from the database of the Subject Centre for LLAS. Additional support in obtaining the necessary information was provided by the members of the Linguistics Specialist Advisory Group of the Subject Centre. While it would not be possible to claim that the sample is representative for all institutions offering Linguistics or English Language, it offers a good mix of institutions from the pre- and the post-1992 sector.

Academics from the Departments or Schools which offer Linguistics or English Language and staff working in the Careers Services of the eleven institutions were asked to provide information regarding the destinations of Linguistics/English Language students in their institutions, as well as examples of good practice in supporting students in obtaining knowledge and skills for the workplace.

All participating institutions were also asked to provide names of graduates who would be willing to be interviewed about their career paths since graduation. This resulted in interviews with eight graduates, from Newcastle, Sussex, UWE Bristol and the University of Westminster. Four of these were interviewed either face-to-face or via Skype and the other four filled in an online questionnaire. The graduates were not paid for their participation.

Current Linguistics/English Language students in one pre-1992 institution (the University of Manchester) and one post-1992 institution (UWE Bristol) were asked to participate in a one-hour focus group discussion about the skills they felt they possessed, and the work experience they had gained during their studies. At the end of the session all students filled in a questionnaire with questions about their career plans, work experience and key skills. The participants were either level two or level three students and they were paid £15 for participating in the sessions which took place in February and March 2010.

A full list of the degree courses of the participants, their years of graduation and their current jobs (if any) can be found in Appendix 1.

A limitation of the current study in relation to the data from the focus groups and the interviews is that the sample of students and graduates who participated in the study is too small to be representative for all those who are studying Linguistics or English Language or have completed such a degree in the UK. As is obvious for a study of this nature, we are dependent upon the participants' willingness to provide information. It is therefore possible that the views discussed in this report are those of the more pro-active students or the more successful graduates. The fact that only graduates with a first class degree or an upper second class degree put themselves forward to be interviewed seems to indicate that this was indeed the case. On the other hand, at least one graduate in our sample volunteered to be interviewed, despite the fact that he was not happy with his current job situation, and several students who participated in the study were still unsure about their career paths. In our opinion, if we are indeed looking at a positive selection of students and graduates, this does not diminish the value of the focus groups or the interviews; the study aims to demonstrate what Linguistics or English Language students can achieve in terms of key skills and what careers graduates can end up doing. To what extent an individual student who starts such a degree will end up with the same skills or will be able to find a similar job remains dependent on a range of factors, not least the student's own initiative, motivation and perseverance. As Maher and Graves (2008:1) put it: "in an increasingly competitive and volatile graduate employment market students must develop greater ownership of their employability skills if they are to maximise their potential for a successful career."

To ensure comparability with earlier studies, we used the questionnaire from the Allan (2006) report about employability and entrepreneurship among Humanities graduates. As the questionnaire was developed for graduates, a separate version was created to make it suitable for students who had not yet completed their studies. A few minor changes were implemented to make possible to measure participants' interest in placements, and their own assessment of their skills on a ten-point scale. We also decided to split the question about literacy and numeracy into two different questions, as we wanted to find out how students assessed both of these skills separately. The revised questionnaire can be found in appendix 2.

For the report on the Destinations of Leavers of Higher Education, the 2007/8 cohort was chosen because the results for the most recent cohort of 2008/9 was not yet available for most universities at the time this report was written (July/August 2010). The figures are taken from the universities' own website for the 2007/8 cohort whenever possible, and the careers' offices of the different universities provided additional clarifications in several cases . Unistats was used in those cases where the universities' website did not provide the information.

Prior to the interviews and the focus groups, all students and graduates were given an information sheet which explained the aims of the project and informed students of their right to withdraw at any point. All participants signed a consent form. Approval from the Ethics Committee at UWE Bristol was sought and obtained prior to the interviews and the focus group sessions.

An education in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences enhances the lives individuals and assists the formation of critical minds to bear on a wide range of crucial issues, resulting in a flourishing public culture, committed to respect for knowledge and intelligent debate.

British Academy Report (2004)

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Destinations of Leavers of Higher Education

In this section we will first review the DLHE statistics for the Linguistics students in the ten universities under study. We put these in the context of the DLHE statistics for the Faculties or Schools that are responsible for these degrees, and the wider context of the universities where these are offered. Subsequently some detail about the category "further study" is provided. Finally we look at the issue of graduate versus non-graduate employment.

A first impression of the careers undertaken by Linguistics/English Language graduates can be obtained from the statistics on the Destinations of Leavers of Higher Education (DLHE statistics), which each university collects six months after graduation. As is well known, the DLHE statistics provide only a very limited perspective of the careers chosen by the respondents because graduates need time to settle into a career and many take time out after their studies, e.g. for travelling. The results can therefore not offer more than a first impression of the employment figures for graduates who are at the beginning of their careers. Table 1 gives an overview of these statistics for the 2007/8 Linguistics cohort for each of the universities under study here. According to Table 1, between a third and two thirds of the Linguistics or English Language graduates are working six months after graduation. Examples of the kinds of jobs held are provided in the last column. As the numbers surveyed are too low to calculate percentages, only the raw figures are given.

University	Course	Number surveyed	Working	Further study/ work and study	No reply/ unknown	Not employed, seeking employment, not vailable for employment	Examples of jobs held
Birmingham City	BA(Hons) English Language Studies	6	2	1	2	1	Receptionist, Senior Advisor
Cardiff	BA(Hons) Communication	33	18	4	10	1	Learning Support Assistant, Communications Manager, Customer Support Officer, English Teacher, Marketing Co-Ordinator
Cardiff	BA(Hons) English Language Studies	39	16	8	14	1	Teaching Assistant, Service Advisor, Police Special Constable, Personal Assistant, BA (Hons)nk Clerk, Speech and Language Therapy Assistant, Customer Service Advisor.
Essex	BA(Hons) Linguistics and/or English language (different degree combinations)	66	33	14	11	8	Assistant Librarian, Business Support Assistant, Customer Service Advisor, Data Entry Clerk Dietetic Assistant, Editor, English Teacher
Leeds	BA(Hons) Linguistics and Phonetics	28	12	3	11	2	Client Service Administrator, Conservation Volunteer, Complaints Analyst, Trainee Retail Manager
Newcastle	BA(Hons) Linguistics	9	3	3	0	3	Clinical Assistant, Front Desk Trainer, Swimming Instructor
Newcastle	BA(Hons) English Language	46	28	13	0	5	Teaching Assistant, Data Inputter, Labour Market Recruitment Advisor, Editorial Assistant, Trainee Commercial Manager
Sussex	BA(Hons) English language and Linguistics	42	26	10	3	3	Graduate training scheme in an e-learning company; teaching assistant; teaching English in Japan; directory manager in an arts PR company; publishing software company; communications/fundraising; reviews editor for XBox 360 magazine; sports event management (after PG dip in event mgmt); PhD psycholinguistics
UCL	BA(Hons) Linguistics	20	3	5	12	0	Media And Publishing, Public Sector, Marketing And PR, Translation And Interpreting, Teaching incl TEFL
UCLAN	BA(Hons) English Language and Literature and BA(Hons) English Language Studies	26	19	4	3	0	Journalism or Media production, Archiving, Librarianship, Publishing, Advertising, Marketing, Public Relations, Media, political or social research, Telecommunications
UWE Bristol	BA(Hons) English Language/ Linguistics (different degree combinations)	21	9	7	3	2	Bank Associate, Learning Support Assistant, Administrator, Personal Assistant, Special Needs Teacher, Assistant Manager Retail.
Westminster	BA(Hons) English Language/ Linguistics (different degree combinations)	51	22	10	6	13	Sixth Form Learning Mentor/ Classroom Assistant; Call Centre Agent, Teaching Assistant; Employment Adviser; Webmanager

If we want to compare the destinations of Linguistics/English Language students with those from other subject areas, it is better to take a wider perspective and to compare students in broader subject areas with each other, as we can then have more confidence in numbers surveyed and calculate percentages for each of the categories distinguished in the DLHE overviews. This has been done in Table 2.

Table 2 gives the first destinations of all graduates from the universities under study here as well as from the Faculties or Schools that own the awards. The first conclusion we can draw from this table is that the percentage of students from these Faculties or Schools who are in work six months after completing their studies is often slightly lower than the percentage of students from the entire university, but the differences are generally very small or even negligible. Interestingly, for some universities the reverse is true. Students in the School of Social Sciences at Essex University are slightly more often employed six months after graduation than students at this university as a whole, and the same is true for students from the Division of Psychology and Language Sciences at UCL, and the School of English at Sussex University.

The second important finding from Table 2 is that the percentage of students who are continuing their studies after graduation is often a little higher for the Humanities and Social Sciences graduates than for the entire cohort of graduates at each university. Both findings confirm those of (Allan 2006) who looked at the DLHE statistics across a wide range of disciplines in the Humanities and the Social Sciences in comparison with students from more vocational degrees.

Table 2. Destinations of leavers of HE Education (DLHE) for 2007/8.

University		In work (PT and FT; incl voluntary work; self-employed)	Further study	Work and further study	Unemployed, seeking employment, not available for employment, other etc	N (respondents excl. unknown and explicit refusals)
Birmingham City	All faculties	65.6	12.1	11.9	10.3	3400
	BCU Performance, Media and English	65.2	15.8	6.8	10.7	234
Cardiff	All faculties	62.2	19.5	7.1	11.3	3646
	Cardiff School of English Studies Communication and Philosophy	57.2	18.7	7.9	16.2	278
Essex	All faculties	54.4	21.3	8.6	14.9	1055
	Essex Social Sciences	55.2	18.4	10.0	16.4	201
Leeds	All faculties	64	19	5	13	unknown
	Leeds Faculty of Arts*	54.9	23.5	4.8	16.8	1286
Manchester	All faculties	65.3	12.3	7.1	12.3	6345
	Manchester Humanities	62.9	15.5	7.2	14.4	3217
Newcastle	All faculties	59.7	20	6.9	13.4	2816
	Newcastle Humanities and Social Sciences	54.9	21.6	9.6	13.9	1549
Sussex	All faculties	57	22	8	14	1716
	Sussex School of English	58	22	8	12	214
UCL	All faculties	61	22	9	8	unknown
	UCL Division of Psychology and Language Sciences	67.5	22.9	3.6	6	149
UCLAN	All faculties	66	10	10	14	Unknown
	UCLAN English studies	63	19	6	13	1365
UWE Bristol	All faculties	71	11	9	10	3027
	UWE Bristol Humanities and Social Sciences	66	15	6	14	825
Westminster	All faculties	62	10	10	19	unknown
	Westminster Social Sciences Humanities and Languages	54.4	14.8	10.1	20.7	434

***For Leeds, Faculty of Arts, the figures refer to the 2008/9 cohort.*

Among the further studies mentioned on the careers pages of the universities, the following are found most often: PGCE secondary Education (English), PGCE Primary Years, MA Speech and Language Therapy and different TEFL/TESOL training courses. Other students continue studying for an MA in Linguistics or a related field. An Essex Linguistics graduate, for example, chose an MA in Varieties of England and UWE graduates continued studying for an MA in Applied Linguistics, Forensic Linguistics or an MA in Neuroscience. Graduates from the BA in English Language Studies at Cardiff started a PGDip in Public and Media Relations, an MA in Applied Linguistics, an MA in Forensic Linguistics or an MA Journalism Studies. At Sussex a student started a PhD in Psycholinguistics, and at Westminster Linguistics graduates chose to study Translation, Interpretation or Social Science after graduation.

Some students choose to develop in a different direction and opt for a completely unrelated subject at M-level. Among the further studies chosen by English Language graduates at Newcastle, for example, we find an MA in Heritage Management, an MA in Property Management and Investment, and a PGCE Design and Technology. A Linguistics graduate from Newcastle started a Graduate Diploma in Law. Graduates from Leeds embarked on a BSc Computer Games Programming and another on a Law Conversion Course (BPP). At Westminster, an English Language graduate went on to study Biological Science and Chemistry, whilst others chose Marketing or Educational Psychology.

Finally, we will briefly look into the percentage of students who find graduate jobs, as this is an important Key Performance Indicator for each University. The overall results for each of the universities under study were obtained from Unistats, and these can be found in Table 3. As the numbers of Linguistics graduates is too small at most universities, it is often impossible to find out to what extent these students find graduate jobs. At Essex University however, the results show that 70% of the former Linguistics students who were employed six months after graduation are in graduate jobs, and this percentage is higher than that for the university as a whole. The percentage of former Linguistics students in graduate employment is lower in Leeds (50%), Manchester (35%) and UWE Bristol (35%). For other institutions, data are not available for Linguistics graduates, but only for graduates per School or Faculty level. The results we were able to obtain are as follows: the School of Performance, Media and English at Birmingham City (66%), the School of English Studies, Communication and Philosophy at Cardiff (45%), and the School of English at Sussex (62%). The percentages can however change quite considerably from year to year. In 2007 in Sussex, for example, 80% of the graduates who were employed at the time of data collection had secured graduate jobs, according to the University's DLHE report 2007. Apart from the exceptions mentioned above, the percentage of those in graduate employment is somewhat lower in these Faculties or Schools than for the universities as a whole.

In summary, the analyses of the first destinations of Linguistics graduates show that slightly fewer students are in employment six months after graduation, compared with the overall figures for each university, but the differences are small and often negligible. For some universities, the employment figures for Linguistics graduates are more positive than for others from the same university. The percentage of those who are in jobs where they use graduate knowledge and skills is often lower for Linguistics graduates, compared with the percentages given for the university as a whole, but in some institutions the Linguistics graduates more often find graduate jobs than others. For most universities in this study it is the case that a relatively large percentage of students opt to continue their studies after completing their first degree. Linguistics students embark on a variety of different degree paths after graduation: students do not necessarily opt for a career in teaching in primary or secondary education or a TEFL career path.

The percentage of students who are continuing their studies after graduation is often a little higher for the Humanities and Social Sciences graduates than for the entire cohort of graduates at each university.

Table 3. Graduate destinations as a percentage of those in employment

University		Graduate jobs
Birmingham City	All faculties	83
	BCU Performance, Media and English	66
Cardiff	All faculties	76
	Cardiff School of English Studies Communication and Philosophy	45
Essex	All faculties	63
	Linguistics	70
Leeds	All faculties	50
Manchester	All faculties	35
Newcastle	All faculties	76
Sussex	All faculties	72
	English	62
UCL	All faculties	84
UCLAN	All faculties	75
UWE Bristol	All faculties	73
	UWE Bristol Humanities and Social Sciences	27
	Linguistics/English Language	35
Westminster		67

Source: Unistats. http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/

For Sussex in 2007 : 80% graduate destinations for Linguistics and English Language DLHE report 2007.

Developing employability skills: examples of good practice

In recent years a wide range of publications have appeared which focus on graduates' job prospects or at employers' needs and these have helped to raised awareness among HE institutions of the importance to engage with students' prospects on the job market. As a result, many institutions have started to integrate work experience, placements or training aimed at enhancing employability skills into the curriculum.

In most universities it is a university-wide career service which offers advice and guidance on career planning, job opportunities, placements and internships, and organises recruitment fairs. As these services are offered by all universities in the current sample, we will not mention these for each university individually, but highlight only those services which are different from those offered elsewhere. More details about the range of activities each institution undertakes can be found by clicking on the links provided. Interestingly, the Career Service at Manchester University reported that Humanities students are much slower to take an interest in career development than, for example, Business students, who are in the Careers Service "from day one". Humanities staff can no doubt play a crucial role in encouraging students to take employability seriously at a much earlier stage.

At Birmingham City University careers advice is offered on a Careers and Jobs Prospects webpage (http://www.bcu.ac.uk/student-info/careers-and-job-prospects). According to the website, students can obtain advice and support from qualified Careers Consultants about how they can develop employability skills whilst at university, as well as information about jobs, work experience and further study opportunities. The site also offers downloadable handouts entitled making yourself employable or finding work in the recession. Particularly interesting are the two mentoring schemes The Employer Mentoring Scheme and the Inspiring Futures Mentoring Scheme, which give students the opportunity to learn from and work with local employers (http://www.bcu.ac.uk/student-info/student-services/student-mentoring).

At Cardiff University, the Careers Services offers some guidance specifically for Humanities students, namely the What can I do with a Humanities Degree workshop. There is also a very useful downloadable resource with this title, and webpages which provide careers information for students from different degree courses. For students who do not know where to start the Careers Services offer a Haven't a clue workshop. More details on the following website: http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/carsv-old/forstudgrad/careersadvice/index.html

The Research and Enterprise Office of the University of Essex provides students with an online skills assessment tool, which is designed to highlight the skills students should focus on when writing a CV or go to a job interview (http://www.essex.ac.uk/reo/ecif/assessments.html). The Careers Centre at Essex also offers a programme of online training courses called WORKskills online, which aims at developing skills for graduate level employment (http://moodle.essex.ac.uk/course/category.php?id=50).

At the University of Leeds, the Careers Service offers a series of talks for Linguistics students, one of which is entitled What can I do with a degree in Linguistics? The other talks provide information about careers paths in Forensic Linguistics, postgraduate study and academia, English Language Teaching, Journalism and Speech and Language Therapy.

At Manchester University, students can take part in the Manchester Leadership Programme (MLP), which consist of a combination of academic study and volunteering, offered in a series of 10 or 20 credit units. In lectures, seminars and volunteer work students identify ways in which leaders influence change in a range of contexts, reflect on their own leadership styles and need to demonstrate they possess skills that contribute to effective leadership, including teamworking, influencing, critical thinking and communication skills. More details at: http://www.mlp.manchester.ac.uk/.

Students at Newcastle University students can register for a 20-credit career development module, during which they spend 70 hours at a placement, spread over all or part of the academic year. The module is assessed through a formal presentation, an interview and a poster presentation. Academics in the Department of English Literature, Language and Linguistics have also organised a "meet the graduates" event where former students now in a range of professions came to give a talk about how their degree has helped in their work. They have also organised an event dedicated to using an English Language or Linguistics degree in TESOL contexts.

The Careers and Employability Centre at the University of Sussex offers annual sessions to the English Department introduce its activities, and they have produced a downloadable careers guide for English Language students (http://www.sussex.ac.uk/cdec/docs/english_language.pdf), with detailed examples of a wide range of possible career paths.

At UCL, the careers services offer an Online Aptitude Test which gives students registered at UCL the option to take a full length, online numeracy and verbal reasoning test similar to those used by a wide range of graduate recruiters (http://www.ucl.ac.uk/careers/). Other services are offered by the Careers Group of the University of London, including a downloadablecareer service guide (http://www.careers.lon.ac.uk/output/Page67.asp).

At the University of Central Lancashire the English language Skills Initiative for Employability (ELSIE) was developed by the English Language and Linguistics subject team, with the support of the Centre for Employability through the Humanities (CETH). The ELSIE scheme is a subject-specific programme for English Language and Linguistics students which has been set up to help undergraduates reflect on their subject-specific and transferable skills and learn how to transfer these skills to a 'work' context (http://www.elsieproject.org.uk/). ELSIE modules are compulsory for single honours English Language Studies students and optional for Combined Honours students taking Language and/or Literature as part of their degree schemes.

At UWE Bristol the Careers Services provide online support to students wishing to develop their employability, on the My Future site (http://myfuture.uwe.ac.uk/RenderPages/RenderHomePage.aspx). This site offers UWE students online career development tools, such as an Online CV building and action plan development tool, and practice aptitude tests. The university has also rolled out a university-wide Graduate in Development Programme, which is a three-year programme intended to support students in developing the skills they need to find a graduate job (http://www.uwe.ac.uk/gdp/index.shtml). In the framework of this programme, the Linguistics//English Language team have prepared PPT presentations for students with suggestions of possible career paths, and invited graduates to come back to UWE to talk to current students about their career paths since graduation.

At the University of Westminster, the Career Development Centre offers Careers pages for students (http://www.wmin.ac.uk/page-595), including a page entitled Your course – what next? (http://www.wmin.ac.uk/page-20125). This page gives information tailored to the needs of students from different degrees and provides links to case studies of graduates who have pursued different careers.

Linguistics students embark on a variety of different degree paths after graduation: they do not necessarily opt for a career in teaching in primary or secondary education or a TEFL career path.

The students' perspective: views from Manchester and UWE Bristol

At the start of the three focus group meetings, we explained that the aims of the meetings were three-fold. First of all, we wanted to find out whether the Linguistics and English Language students had concrete plans for the future, and if so, which career paths they were hoping to go into. In the second place, we asked students which skills they felt they had acquired during their studies, either through the content of the academic programme, or through part-time work or social activities, and why they considered these skills to be important assets on the job market. Finally we asked all participants how their universities had supported them to develop their skills, and which improvements could be made to support future generations of students better. At the end of the focus group meetings students filled in a questionnaire.

Aspirations

The starting point for this section will be a summary of the careers students had anticipated going into at the start of their studies. In reply to a question in the questionnaire which addressed the issue of the line of work they had originally thought they might go into upon graduation, three students mentioned journalism, and others had originally thought they might work in marketing, or for a TV/radio station. Teaching foreign languages or literary studies were also indicated as possibilities.

At UWE the students' aspirations were very similar at the beginning of their studies. Five students mentioned teaching, but without indicating what they would like to teach. Four students said they were interested in journalism. One student said she had hoped to go into Linguistics research and lecturing. Retail, counselling and therapy were also stated. At both universities, there were students who frankly admitted they had no idea.

During the focus group meetings, it became clear that the students had developed clearer and more realistic ideas about their futures in the course of their studies, and their horizons had noticeably broadened. At Manchester, one student said that she had enjoyed learning about the sounds of English in the first year and had worked in a school with children with language difficulties. She planned to enrol on a postgraduate course to do either Speech and Language Therapy or Social work.

Others wanted to go into advertising, enrol on a law conversion course to become a lawyer, or start working in a publishing company to do proof reading or editorial work. One student said he wanted to take some time out and work in London for a while to get some work experience ("not serious work but just enough to live of") and one student was hoping to get into children's tv.

Several UWE students mentioned wanting to do Speech and Language Therapy (SLT). One of those hoping to get in to SLT had tried out some journalistic work but felt it was not a secure career path in comparison with working as a speech and language therapist, which she saw as a "slightly more guaranteed job". The students were hoping to do some volunteer work in a SLT department to increase their chances to get into a postgraduate course. Another student wanted to become a teacher in a primary school, as he had done some teaching in a school already, and thought his chances as a male might be relatively good, but in the first year after graduation he was "not going straight into doing something."

Several students aimed to do a masters degree. One also mentioned a PhD in Psycholinguistics or Neuroscience, but wanted to start his masters one year after graduation. The following postgraduate studies were mentioned too: a masters in phonetics and phonology, psycholinguistics, forensic linguistics or careers advising. A career as a teacher of English in secondary schools appealed to one of those present. Another wanted to travel in South America as he was interested in other cultures and in particular in music. He hoped to teach TESOL as a way to make a living, but did not see this as his career path in the future. At UWE one student thought that "many students come out with the same degree. You need something unique, for example a Masters or a PhD."

When asked about the prospect of working for a company one UWE student said that this was her "worst nightmare" and another considered jobs that are advertised for graduates in companies to be "hideously boring". Crucially however, many students felt that they did not know enough about working for a company. It was easier for them to obtain information about working in teaching.

In summary, at the beginning of their studies many students reported that they were unsure what future careers they might embark upon, but a wider range of options were being considered a few years into the degree. It also became clear that students need more information about careers in industry.

Work experience acquired during UG studies

Most students had worked in temporary jobs during their studies. Some of these jobs involved unpaid volunteer work, which students did because they felt this would be beneficial for their career prospects and for a variety of other reasons. At Manchester the following jobs were mentioned. One student worked for Manchester University' Student Action. This involved working with homeless people. He said this was an eye opener for him: "It was good experience, because you see a different side of life, and you learn to be able to react differently in different situations".

Another student worked for Selfridges and explained that she found it useful to be able to demonstrate she could manage her time, and create a balance between work and study. Over Christmas she was also going to help with training Selfridges Christmas temps, and hoped it would be an advantage to be able to add that to her CV.

A third student had worked as a student ambassador for Linguistics and Spanish. She explained that she had to do presentations on what it is like to study, and what the course is like. As she was hoping to go into advertisement, this experience was useful for her future: "for advertisement you have to give presentations every week. That is practice for me and it shows I have experience in communication." She had also done some Spanish teaching in primary. A fourth student had worked part time as a life guard, and another had been to America to teach. Finally one student made it clear how she made a link between the choices of her modules at University and the work she did in her spare time: "I have worked in a play centre, for three years now. It is quite rewarding to work with children. I'll take a module on language acquisition in the final year." Similarly, one student said he had gained work experience at the Guardian, which he considered to be good for his career prospects "because it's a great paper to say you have worked for."

At UWE many students had tried out doing some teaching in primary or secondary schools, through the University's Outreach Centre. One student put it this way: "A lot of students are looking into teaching. Jobs that are relevant for Linguistics or English Language students are teaching-oriented or children-oriented. Teaching also fits around your studies." She felt that volunteering was not an option for many students because of their financial situation. Two students who had worked in schools during their studies did not anticipate continuing in this profession, as they felt teachers were underpaid and underappreciated. A male student had been involved in writing for a student newspaper. He felt it was good to have to "manage several different things at once: manage your studies, and being a secretary for sports club. I was juggling lots of balls."

Another student worked in a retail job. Although this was not related to Linguistics, she felt it was useful to meet a wide range of people in the work place, many of whom don't speak English. She said she was able to apply in the work place what she had learned during the Linguistics/ English Language course: it had helped her "to understand other people a lot better. I can see other people pre-judge. Before I started my studies I was like that. I don't do that anymore."

Working as a student representative had also been very useful or one of the students: she had helped to promote the National Student Survey, and was the Chair of a group which was implementing a mentoring scheme.

Transferable skills

When asked what transferable skills were, one Manchester student formulated it this very aptly: "When you have learnt something and you can apply it to a different situation." As we were interested in students' own perceptions of their skills, we did not present them with a list of possible transferable skills in the first instance. Instead asked the students to imagine they were going to a job interview and were invited to explain which skills they had acquired during their studies, either through the content of their degree course or as a result of their work alongside their studies.

Many students mentioned communication skills in the first instance: One Manchester "The English language is obviously all about communication. You study in the language constantly. You analyse situations that other people are in." One UWE student said that she had learned to communicate with many different people, and another student said he had learned to be "quite diplomatic". They mentioned that they had learned to communicate with people in authority. University is a nice environment and you can respectfully disagree with a lecturer." They also felt being able to analyse oneself was a valuable skill: Being able to look at your own work and analyse yourself. In their opinion, students do not get this kind of reflexivity on other courses. A Manchester student also mentioned communication skills in relation to jobs in education: "If you know how children communicate, that makes you a better teacher."

Another Manchester student who had been to an interview with an advertisement company last year, said that the company "quite liked it that I had done linguistics. You have to use analytical skills, creative skills. A bit of everything. It shows you have a broader range of skills."

Others mentioned group work they had done in the second year of their English language degree. Experience of working in a team and social skills were also mentioned frequently, as well as writing to deadlines and time management. A group project at level 3 on the Linguistics HA, where students worked together to collect data on the pronunciation of the Bristol /r/ in Bristol was mentioned as an example of group work they had enjoyed and found useful because "you have to rely on other people."

One Manchester student said that "to write an essay you also need to be able to construct to a coherent argument and come to a valid conclusion." UWE students mentioned language awareness, and one said she had learned to write very well, and was confident that she would be able to make contacts with others on behalf of a company in an appropriate way. She felt that Linguistics and English Language students were generally more eloquent than others. Students on the English Language degree said they had learned to value intercultural communication.

A key point mentioned by all groups was that moving away from home taught them to be independent. A UWE student said: "No one will look after you. You have to live with other people that aren't your family. That is a hell of a blast." They felt they had learned to be self reliant and responsible: " If you don't do it yourself it doesn't get done."

Another UWE student said that he felt more responsible and independent, "although I have quite a way to go. I have travelled around quite a bit. I am more prepared for going and working in a different country." Other UWE students mentioned that doing a research project in the final year had helped them to become more independent.

One UWE student found organisational skills to be most important: "Organisation is the biggest thing I have come out with. I had three jobs, studied and tried to have a social life. For a while I did find that really hard, but I have got it now. That is one thing I wouldn't have come out with if I hadn't gone to Uni."

More information about the students' own perception of their transferable skills was obtained with the help of a questionnaire. The results can be found in Table 4.

Table 4 largely confirms the findings obtained during the focus group meetings. In general, students are confident about the skills they have acquired: they perceive themselves as having gained excellent literacy skills, written and oral communication skills, as well as independent working skills. They are least confident about their numeracy skills, for which they give themselves a score that is less than half of their score for literacy. Apart from that, students give themselves relatively low marks for team working skills and intercultural awareness.

Students are however not always aware of the skills they have acquired or of the importance of mentioning these as a valuable skill. When asked about her IT skills, one UWE student said: "I wouldn't even put IT skills on a CV because you cannot graduate without it. I hadn't even thought to highlight that on a CV."

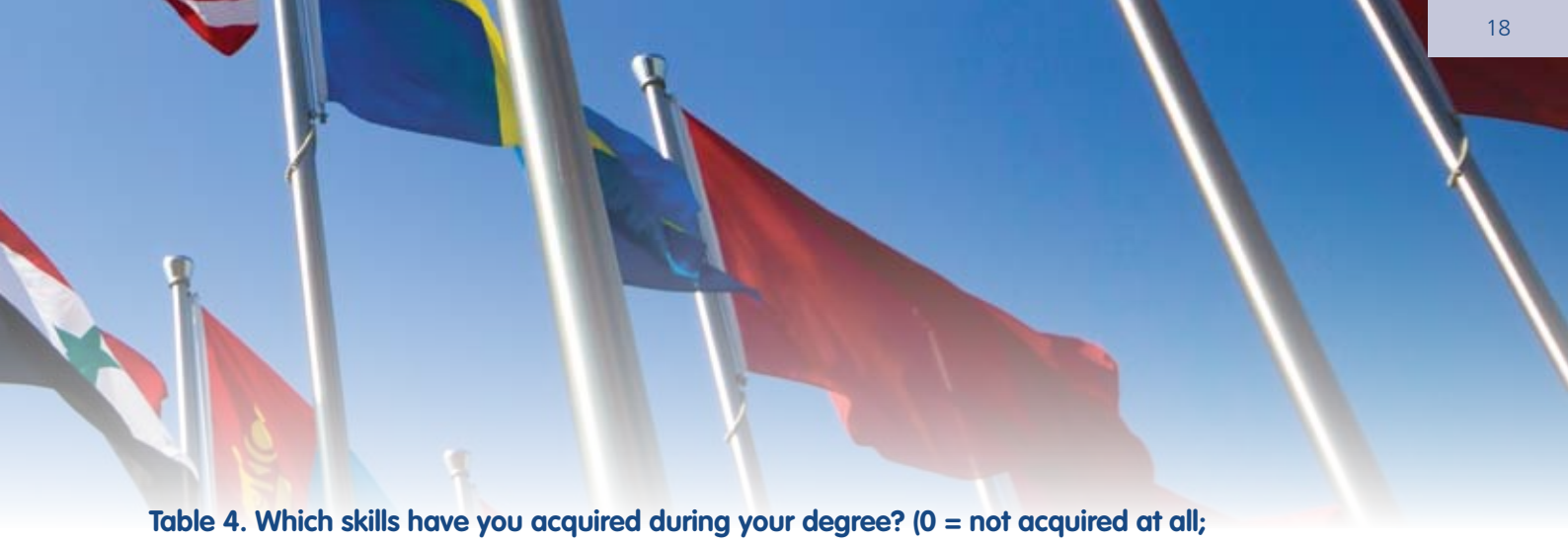

Table 4. Which skills have you acquired during your degree? (0 = not acquired at all; 10 = perfect mastery of this skill), N =17

Key skill	Average
Literacy	9.1
Numeracy	4.6
IT skills	7.3
Written and oral communication skills	8.6
Data handling, interpretation and presentation	7.2
Team working	7.0
Analytical, problem-solving and evaluation skills	7.9
Intercultural awareness	7.0
Time management and organisational skills	8.2
Ability to present and defend logical arguments	7.9
Critical thinking	7.9
Independent working	8.7
Abstracting and synthesising information	7.9

What can lecturers do to help students build a career?

UWE students felt that practical applications of the knowledge and skills they had learned should be integrated in the degree course as this would make students more aware of the sorts of things you could do. They mentioned in particular practical work experience, e.g. a teaching practice should be included in a TESOL training module and they would like to receive an accredited diploma in TESOL at the end of the module. Others mentioned a placement year, or thought a field trip could have been incorporated into the module on Intercultural Communication "to put into practice in Japan the ICC you have learnt. That would make a huge difference." More presentations, in particular group presentations were also considered to be useful, "as there are a large number of jobs in business where you are required to speak in front of people, so students would benefit from practising presentation skills."

Students were also asked which skills they felt universities should pay more attention to developing. Several UWE students mentioned numeracy to be important, whilst critical thinking, team work and analytical skills were also brought up regularly.

At Manchester, numeracy skills and IT skills were mentioned most frequently as necessary, but intercultural awareness and writing skills were also pointed out as important.

Placements/internships

The students at both universities said that placements or internships were not available on the Linguistics or English Language courses they were enrolled on, but several had participated in Faculty-wide or university-wide modules or programmes on offer in each institution, such as the Leadership module or the Career Management Skills module at Manchester, or work placements offered through UWE's career service (see section 5 for more details). A Manchester student also mentioned the possibility of going to study in America for a semester, but said that not all students were aware of the options they have.

Many students felt that integrating a placement into the Linguistics/English Language award would be a very good idea. One Manchester student put it this way: "In English courses or Linguistics, they don't give you any opportunity to do work experience. If that could be integrated into the course, that would make it much more attractive to students."

For some students a lack of awareness of the opportunities they have appears to be a key issue. A student from Manchester formulated it as follows: "Most people are not very pro-active. Most people don't realise. Opportunities are there, but you've got to go looking for it."

Conclusion

The results of the focus groups reveal that many students were unsure which career paths they would be able to embark upon after graduation, even though some had developed broader perspectives in the course of their studies, and had started considering master programmes or jobs that were not directly related to the subject of their studies. Some students did not intend to go into work or study straightaway after graduation, but wanted to take some time out to travel. More information about career paths in industry is clearly needed, as well as further development of skills that are highly valued in the workplace, in particular numeracy, team work and presentation skills. Most students were aware of the fact that they had developed good communication and literacy skills, but not all knew which other skills are needed in the world of work. Students who had taken modules of the Manchester Leadership Programme had clearly benefitted from the experience of volunteering and reporting on their experiences, and students who have worked part time in schools or elsewhere also felt this had given them important skills. Most students felt that integrating a placement or practical applications into the degree course would be very valuable.

Jeanine Treffers-Daller and Jeanette Sakel (UWE Bristol)

Career paths after graduation: views from Linguistics/English Language graduates

In this section we will present the main findings from the interviews held with graduates and from the questionnaires they filled in. A detailed overview of the graduates who agreed to participate in the study, the degree courses they were enrolled on and their current jobs or studies can be found in appendix 1.

Current jobs or studies

Three of the eight interviewees had graduated more than three years ago, and the others had graduated between 2007 and 2009. It is fully understandable that those who had graduated more than three years ago were more firmly settled in their careers than those who had graduated relatively recently. Among those who graduated between 2001 and 2004 we find a Senior Tax Manager, a Speech and Language Therapist, and an English Teacher. Among the other five, two were fulltime enrolled on postgraduate courses, one was working as a research analyst for a company whilst studying for a postgraduate degree and two were in temporary work, but considering the possibility to enrol on a postgraduate course.

Many respondents indicate that they do indeed use graduate knowledge and skills in their current job. Clearly those respondents who work in areas closely related to their degree course make a lot of use of the content of their degree. In response to the question which aspects of the job required them to use the subject knowledge gained during your degree, the UWE graduate who had been an English teacher for four years put it this way: "Lots! Knowledge of sentence structure, word classes etc. I also teach A Level English Language, which contains a lot of the same material as my degree e.g. child language acquisition, language change etc." With respect to the generic skills, she indicates that she uses ICT on a daily basis to organise and present data: "I have to work as part of a team and communication (with students, parents and colleagues) is key. Time management and the ability to work independently is vital in my current role."

The Sussex graduate who works as a Speech and Language Therapist explains that "Linguistics (esp. Language development and disorder, phonology, semantics, syntax) is directly useful for assessment and treatment of acquired neurological language disorders." With respect to the generic skills she notes that "all of these skills are key in my field of work, except numeracy and data analysis which play a lesser part (though would come further to the fore if I were involved in research). In particular oral and written communication skills are essential as a Speech and Language Therapist, both for communicating with impaired patients and or communicating findings/advocating/ discussing with the team and family of this patient."

Other graduates who work in areas less directly related to the content of the degree course may use less of the actual knowledge they acquired but they do need the generic skills they have acquired, in particular the oral and written communication skills. The UWE graduate who works as a research analyst, for example, says she needs to write a lot in her job: "One of the key things to get this job is that you need to be able to write in a way that is analytical but without being biased or showing any preference. A degree in English Language and Linguistics helps you to be able to write. You learn those writing skills at Uni."

The Westminster graduate who works for a computer games company believes that "you don't necessarily need a degree to do my current job, but you need knowledge of grammar and attention to detail. I can use the skills and knowledge I acquired during my studies in my current job." Another Westminster graduate feels his current job is just a temporary solution, as he does not need the skills he acquired very much as a general clerk for the NHS.

The Newcastle graduate confirms that she did indeed need to have a degree to work as a Senior Tax Manager. In addition, she uses the subject knowledge from her degree because in her job she needs to be" aware of language structure and ambiguity, and be aware of how different people use language differently and react/perceive people differently depending on the language they use." In addition she explains she uses "the soft skills around communicating with others."

Placements

Only one graduate reported having been on a placement during her studies: this was a student who had studied French and Linguistics, and the placement was compulsory on this degree. None of the others had had the opportunity to go on a placement as part of their degree. Most graduates said that they would have liked to go on a placement, if it had been available. Only one student said that they would have preferred doing this during the summer holidays. Interestingly, one Westminster graduate said that during his studies he was not particularly interested in any placement, as he was very focused on the academic content of the degree but "now that would appeal to me. After graduation I was confronted with reality: what do I do with myself?"

The results from the questionnaires show the possibility of doing a placement with a company in the city in which they were studying appealed most to the respondents, but an EFL teaching placement outside Europe or studying abroad were the second most popular choices. Working for a company elsewhere in the UK or in Europe were the least popular choices.

Extra-curricular activities and key skills acquired through these

Five of the eight graduates had participated in a variety of clubs during their studies. A UWE graduate took part in musicals and was a member of the dance society at UWE's Centre for Performing Arts. She believed that this had increased her skills in working with other people at a higher level than she was used to, because the theatre company she belonged to raised money to send disabled children on holidays. She therefore actively participated in fundraising and acted as a supervisor and carer during the trips. A graduate from Sussex participated in the university's trampolining club, as a member and a coach. She felt that this had furthered her team working skills. A Westminster graduate had participated in activities to promote the National Student Survey and also in different focus groups. This had helped her to become more self-confident to approach other people. Of those who had not taken part in any extracurricular activities, two claimed that there was little on offer at the university, and one said that she was a mature student and did not live on campus, and this had affected her decision not to take part.

Work experience

All students had gained some work experience during their studies, and sometimes these were closely linked in with their career plans. A UWE graduate took part in the university's Student Associates' Scheme, and taught English at a primary school as part of that. He felt this was a useful experience for him as he had not worked with young children before. He learned to self-reflect as he had to keep a log book, reflecting on what he had seen during the day and he had observed teachers using very different teaching approaches in class. This was very useful for him, as he planned to become an EFL teacher. A Westminster graduate also participated in the Student Associates' Scheme but said that she discovered in that role that teaching was not the right career for her. She had started to work for a computer games firm and was able to use her knowledge of German and her knowledge of Linguistics in that role. A graduate from Newcastle had worked as a technical (tax) assistant in year 1 and as a receptionist/administrator in year 2 for an accountant's firm, and she is now a Senior Tax Manager. A Sussex student said she had worked in a travel agent's for two summers and as a receptionist in a computer programming company another summer, but had not worked during term time. A few days work experience shadowing Speech and Language Therapists had however had a major impact on her future career choice: "This definitely made me more aware of the profession of Speech and Language Therapy and confirmed my interest in it. This therefore led me onto apply for Assistant work in the field, and ultimately to complete the PGDip training in order to qualify as an SLT."

While some graduates reported having done very basic part-time work for purely financial reasons, such as bar work at a city centre bar, kitchen work at the students union, call centre work or cleaning during university holidays, many had

made an effort to find paid or unpaid work that appealed to them and could help them to develop their careers further. In many cases, after completing their studies, the graduates had continued working in areas that they had gained experience in during their studies. The few examples that we have looked at in this section clearly illustrate that work experience gained during the course of a study is often crucial for students' further career.

Key skills

The graduates are generally quite optimistic about the skills they had acquired during their studies, either as part of their degree course or as a result of other activities undertaking at the same time. As Table 5 shows, the students are most confident about their literacy skills, their written and oral communication skills and their ability to work independently. Least developed during their studies are, in their view, clearly their numeric skills, whilst team working also obtains a fairly low score.

Table 5. Which skills have you acquired during your degree? (0 = not acquired at all; 10 = perfect mastery of this skill)

Key skill	Average
Literacy	8.5
Numeracy	3.8
IT skills	7.1
Written and oral communication skills	8.3
Data handling, interpretation and presentation	7.1
Team working	5.9
Analytical, problem-solving and evaluation skills	7.5
Intercultural awareness	6.9
Time management and organisational skills	7.5
Ability to present and defend logical arguments	7.1
Critical thinking	7.3
Independent working	8.1
Abstracting and synthesising information	7.0

When asked which skills they feel universities should pay more attention to, the respondents mentioned literacy (2x), IT skills (2x), critical thinking (2x), analytical and evaluation skills (2x), and also independent working, intercultural awareness, doing presentations in front of large groups and abstracting and synthesising information.

Aspirations

Some respondents had a clear goal prior to embarking on their studies. The UWE graduate who is now enrolled on an MA TESOL explains that he always wanted to become a teacher of EFL, preferably in China, and had started a degree because he felt that he did not know enough about English yet. When asked whether or not he considered himself to be successful he explains: "I am happy with the outcome, still heading the way I wanted to go – teaching English here or abroad is my main goal."

For most of the graduates, the interest in the subject formed the main motivation for choosing Linguistics or English Language, and many did not have clear career aspirations at the start of their degree course. The graduate who now works as a research analyst said that she did not know what she wanted to do when she chose her university subject:

> "I just chose what I was interested in, what I enjoyed. I knew I wanted to do something that would help people, for example SLT. I also considered teaching, but I didn't have any set ideas."

In a similar vein, the Newcastle graduate who is now a senior Tax Manager explains that she "wanted to do something she was good at (English language at a level) and something I enjoyed (literature) purely for its own sake not as a vocational course, after four years of working and moving around jobs. I found I was better suited to an "evidence" based course and switched to English Language for year 2."

The same reason for choosing Linguistics was given by the graduate who is now a teacher: "I chose the degree as I was extremely interested in linguistics. I opted for a joint degree with sociology as the University did not offer a 'whole' linguistics degree." She is happy with the choices she made: "I consider myself successful in that I have a career that I love. I enjoy going to work every day and generally

consider myself to be good at my job. I make a positive contribution to society. My career is fairly flexible and I hope it will offer me development opportunities in the future. I am probably not perceived as successful in terms of salary, status etc. but these are not that important to me."

Conclusion

The interviews with the eight graduates reveal that those who had graduated more than three years ago had firmly settled into graduate careers, whilst those who had completed their studies more recently were either enrolled for postgraduate studies or in temporary work but considering enrolling for further studies. At the start of their studies, many of the graduates who were interviewed were unsure about the career paths they could go into, and in this respect they are similar to the Manchester an UWE students who participated in the focus group meetings. The work experience they had gathered during their studies had clearly had a strong influence upon the careers they had chosen after graduation, with several still employed in areas they had worked in during their studies. Just like the students, the graduates thought integrating work experience into a degree would be very useful. This might also facilitate the transition to the world of work, and help graduates who might otherwise suddenly feel "confronted with reality". With respect to the knowledge and skills they had acquired during their studies, those who were in jobs that were closely related to their degrees, felt they were using a lot of subject-specific knowledge and skills, but those who were in other careers reported they would not have been able to do their current job if they had not developed the necessary key skills while at University.

In English courses or Linguistics, they don't give you any opportunity to do work experience. If a placement could be integrated into the course, that would make it much more attractive to students.

A Manchester student

General conclusion and recommendations

In this study we have reported on the first destinations of graduates of eleven HE institutions which offer English Language or Linguistics, based on the statistics on Destinations of Leavers of Higher Education (DLHE) for 2007/8, reviewed good practice in preparing students for the world of work in each of these institutions, reported on focus groups with 17 English Language and Linguistics students at two universities and summarised the results of interviews with eight graduates from four different institutions. Although the results cannot be considered to be representative for all universities which offer English Language or Linguistics, the sample provides detailed and varied information about the employability of students from both the pre-1992 and the post-1992 sectors.

Our study confirms most of the findings of the Allan (2006) report, and builds on this in that it provides information about current students' perspectives on their own skills as well as information about the support universities give to develop their students' chances on the job market.

The analyses of the DLHE statistics show that a third to two-thirds of the English Language and Linguistics graduates are in employment six months after graduation, and that a relatively large group combines work with further studies. As the number of students for each degree is relatively small it is difficult to compare the results between institutions. Instead an overview of the DLHE statistics is offered at the level of the Schools or Faculties which own the awards. This overview shows that the percentage of students from these Schools or Faculties who are in work shortly after graduation is lower than the percentage of students in employment who were enrolled in those institutions as a whole, although the differences are often small. The percentage of those in graduate employment also lagged behind the figure for the institutions as a whole, even though there were exceptions to this general pattern among our sample of universities. One reason why the percentage of students in (graduate) employment may be lower is that some students take time out after graduation: this was also the case with a few students who participated in our focus groups.

The percentage of those who continue studying is higher among students with a Humanities/ Social Sciences background, but the students in our focus groups did not always want to start postgraduate studies straightaway after completing their BA, and a year after graduation two of the graduates we interviewed were still considering different postgraduate postgraduate options but had not yet enrolled. If this is a more general trend among Humanities students, it could be another reason why the number of Humanities students in graduate employment or study is lower than that for other disciplines.

All institutions that were included in this study offer students support to prepare for the world of work. Generally this support is provided by the Universities' Career Services, and in some cases, for example in Manchester and Newcastle, students can enrol on credit-bearing modules which involve volunteering, self-reflection on the skills they obtain during their work experience module and an assessment of the students' work. At the University of Central Lancashire a subject-specific programme for English Language and Linguistics students has been set up to help undergraduates reflect on their subject-specific and transferable skills and learn how to transfer these skills to work situations, and this programme is compulsory for Single Honours students. Other institutions offer online support and detailed handouts or aptitude tests on their webpages. Clearly all of these are very important to help students manage the transition to the world of work, where some of them feel they are suddenly "confronted with reality" as one graduate in the current study put it. Offering credit-bearing modules to students may however well be the best way to ensure students take the employability agenda seriously.

The focus group meetings at the University of Manchester and UWE Bristol and the interviews with graduates revealed that many participants did not have clear career plans when they started their studies, but had become more focused on their career options in the course of their studies. The work experience they were able to gain (either on their own initiative or through the university's career services) was crucially important for widening their perspectives: the interviews with graduates showed that they often continued working in areas in which they had gained experience during their studies. Unsurprisingly, most students and graduates welcomed the suggestion to include a placement or practical applications into an English Language/Linguistics degree.

With respect to the options the students thought were open to them, there is a clear need for further information about career paths that are not directly related to the content of the degree course. While many students know about possible careers in Education, Speech and Language Therapy or Publishing, they are relatively uninformed about careers in industry.

With respect to the key skills, there is a great deal of similarity between the replies given by current students and graduates. Both groups give the highest scores to their literacy skills, written and oral communication skills, as well as independent working skills. They are least confident about their numeracy skills, for which they give themselves a score that is less than half of their score for literacy. Apart from that, students and graduates give themselves relatively low marks for team working skills.

It is very interesting that many students spontaneously brought up many of the skills Hudson (2003) mentions in his paper How can key skills "sell" Linguistics to students and employers? A considerable proportion of the students are however not fully aware of the kinds of skills they need to increase their employability. It is at this point that lecturers can help to raise awareness of the skills students are acquiring in a particular module, because, as Hudson points out, skills are more likely to be transferable if the learner is aware of them." It is therefore of vital importance for tutors on degree courses in English Language and Linguistics to take the employability agenda seriously, and to make room in the curriculum for activities that can help students prepare for the world of work. As we have pointed out at the beginning of our report, this will become increasingly important with rising study fees and student debt: school-leavers may decide not to start a degree if it is not seen to contribute significantly to an individual's career prospects. Even though a university degree is about much more than employability, it should be very high on the agenda of those responsible for Humanities degrees, including degrees in English Language or Linguistics.

The key recommendations from this report for those responsible for delivering degrees in English Language and Linguistics are therefore:

Key skills

- To raise awareness of the key skills students acquire when studying particular modules by making these explicit in classes, and/or requiring students to keep a log of the skills they are developing during their studies
- To include more training in numeracy and team work into the curriculum

Placement

- To include an optional credit-bearing placement into the curriculum, in which students apply their knowledge and skills in real life.

Guidance in career options

- To provide more information about career options that are not directly related to the content of the degree course.
- To integrate sessions on employability and career options into the curriculum from level one, to encourage students to consider their career options at an early stage

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In my job I need to be aware of language structure and ambiguity, and be aware of how different people use language differently and react/perceive people differently depending on the language they use.

Newcastle English Language graduate, working as a Senior Tax Manager

Appendix 1

Overview of students who participated in the focus group meetings of Linguistics/English Language students and of graduates who were individually interviewed or filled in a questionnaire.

UWE focus group 1 (level three students), 25 February 2010

Gender	Age	Degree course	Year of graduation
female	22	English Language and Linguistics	2010
female	21	English Language and Linguistics	2010
male	22	English Language and Linguistics	2010

UWE focus group 2 (level two students), 2 March 2010

Gender	Age	Degree course	Year of graduation
male	25	English language and linguistics	2011
female	22	Linguistics and Psychology	2011
female	21	English Literature and Linguistics	2011
male	20	Linguistics and Intercultural Communication	2011
female	20	English Language and Linguistics	2011
male	25	English Language and Linguistics	2011
female	20	English Literature and Linguistics	2011

Manchester focus group (level two and level three students), 17 March 2010

Gender	Age	Degree course	Year of graduation
female	20	English Language	2011
male	20	English Language	2010
female	20	English Language	2011
female	22	Linguistics and Spanish	2010
female	20	Linguistics	2010
female	21	English Language	2010
female	20	English Language and Spanish	2010

Graduates interviewed

Gender	University	Degree course	Degree classification	Year of graduation	Current job/study
female	Newcastle	English Language	1	2004	Senior Tax Manager at Deloitte LLP
female	Sussex	French and Linguistics	2;1	2003	Specialist Speech and Language Therapist (Stroke) at Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust
female	UWE Bristol	Psychology and Linguistics	1	2009	MSc in Neuropsychology at Bristol University
male	UWE Bristol	Education and Linguistics	2;1	2009	MA TESOL Bath Spa
female	UWE Bristol	English Language and Linguistics	1	2008	MA neuroscience, language and communication, UCL (part time); working as research analyst for corporate intelligence company in Bristol
female	UWE Bristol	Sociology and Linguistics	1	2001	Teacher of English, Literacy Co-ordinator, the Grange School, South Gloucestershire.
female	Westminster	Linguistics with English Language	1	2009	Games Tester (proofreading games that were translated into German)
male	Westminster	English Language and Linguistics	1	2007	General clerk for NHS

Appendix 2: questionnaire (adapted from Allan 2006)

The student experience in Linguistics and employability

A Personal details

1. University attended:
2. Full title of degree:
3. Year of graduation:
4. Class of degree obtained:
5. Further degrees/diplomas obtained:
6. Any other details - years repeated, courses changed, etc:
7. Name of current employer:
8. Nature of business:
9. Your job title:
10. Outline of your role and main responsibilities

B Composition of degree

1. Did your degree comprise any other aspects such as field work studies, a year in industry, or a year abroad?
2. Was this element compulsory or optional?
3. Was there the possibility of adding such an element to your degree? Yes no
4. Would you have liked to go on a placement during your studies?

0 = no, absolutely not	1	2	3	4	5 = yes definitely

5. Would you have considered doing a placement of the following type:

	0 = no, absolutely not	1	2	3	4	5 = yes definitely
A company in your current city						
A company anywhere in the UK						
A company in Europe						
An EFL teaching placement outside Europe (eg in Vietnam or China)						
A study placement abroad (at a university)						
Other placement, namely:						

6 Which duration would you have preferred? Please tick.

Less than one term	One term (= 3 months)	Two terms (=6 months)

C Extra-curricular activities

1. During your time at university, which clubs and societies did you actively take part in?
2. Which skills did you develop during those activities?
3. During your time at university, what part time work did you do? (paid or voluntary including work done during the university vacations)
4. Have you undertaken any work experience directly related to your degree discipline? If so, how do you believe this has enhanced your career prospects?

D Key skills

1. Which skills have you acquired during your degree? (0 = not acquired at all; 10 = perfect mastery of this skill)

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Literacy											
numeracy											
IT skills											
Written and oral communication skills											
Data handling, interpretation and presentation											
Team working											
Analytical, problem-solving and evaluation skills											
Intercultural awareness											
Time management and organisational skills											
Ability to present and defend logical arguments											
Critical thinking											
Independent working											
Abstracting and synthesising information											

2. Which of the above skills would you recommend Universities should pay more attention to developing?

E Aspirations

1. Before starting your degree what line of work had you hoped to go into?

2. What was your motivation for choosing your degree and university?

3. Was your university and degree programme your first choice?

4. Did your university career fulfil the expectations you had of it before you began?

0= no not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 = yes,fully

5. How did your family influence your choice of higher education?

6. How did your teachers influence your choice of higher education?

E Plans for the future/ Career details (this part was omitted for current students)

1. How long have you been with your current employer? Please give details of internal promotions or changes in role.

2. Please outline your activities since graduation including periods of further study, travel or other positions.

3. Was your degree a requirement of your post's job specification?

4. What aspects of your job use the subject knowledge gained during your degree?

5. Thinking about the key skills mentioned above, how have you used these in the world of work (in your current role or in previous roles)?

6. Thinking about the key skills mentioned above, to what extent do you feel you have added to these through your work experience?

7. To what extent do you feel these skills have been added to by other experiences, prior to, during or since your degree?

8. If you were to compare your job with your previous expectations of your career, do you consider yourself successful?

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