

ASHPIT Newsletter

Focus on Employer Engagement for Employability



ARTS, SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES POLICY IMPLEMENTATION THINK TANK (ASHPIT)

Volume 3

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Welcome!



The Arthur Lewis Building at the University of Manchester—location for the third ASHPIT day

Welcome to the third newsletter for ASHPIT, the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities Policy & Practice Implementation Think Tank.

The ASHPIT newsletters are an important part of the process of reporting the project’s progress back to VITAE, but equally importantly they are also intended to bring the headlines of our Think Tank days to all the members of our mailing list. In them, you can expect to find summaries of key points of policy relating to the theme of the previous Think Tank day and of the presentations given and the key points raised during group discussions at those events. We’ll bring you news of upcoming Think Tank days and of opportunities for potential new projects arising from ASHPIT. If you wish to find out some more general information about ASHPIT, please feel free to contact us at: ashpit@nottingham.ac.uk

The Policy Review

The policy review will form an important part of each Think Tank day. Its purpose is to: help respond to the strategic aims of our organisations; prove the

relevance of the work we do; help us write successful funding bids for extended/enhanced activity; and ensure that the support we provide for postgraduates


and research staff in skills development is relevant to both their needs and the needs of employers.

Employer Engagement for Employability in Policy

There are compelling reasons to undertake employer engagement. Connor and Brown’s *The Value of Graduates and Postgraduates* talks about the opportunities it gives us to access up-to-date information on skills needs, to develop business experience opportunities for researchers, and as a mechanism for feedback. Employer engagement also provides the (possibly contentious) opportunity for us to inform employers about the skills of postgraduates and to let them know about

recent policy imperatives in postgraduate training (such as the Roberts’ initiatives and their impact on the researcher environment). To this we would add the potential (particularly of placements) to make a long-term impact on researcher careers, where a placement leads to a direct offer of employment or the networking opportunities facilitate an easier transition into a similar job in that sector. Thinking more broadly, one-off interactions can become longer-term

interventions and there is a clear opportunity for the employer engagement that we undertake to lead to more long-standing research relationships like Collaborative Doctoral Awards and Knowledge Transfer Partnerships. At the same time, employer engagement is rising up our to-do lists because of three convergent strands within the changing policy landscape in HE: the increasing prominence given to employer engagement for skills development in policy



The next think tank day will take place on **Thursday 10th November at SOAS** (exact location tbc). The provisional focus is **Research Staff**, however, this might change in response to the forthcoming BIS white paper on research and innovation. If you would like to attend, please send an email registering your interest to: ashpit@nottingham.ac.uk by **Thursday 13th October**.

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Developments in policy from Dearing to Hodge and Beyond

“there is an increasingly prescriptive tendency in policy around employer engagement.”

from Dearing to Hodge; the new focus on impact for the forthcoming REF; and the new focus on employability at undergraduate level brought about by the higher fee levels.

Developments in policy from Dearing to Hodge and Beyond

It is clear that there is an increasingly prescriptive tendency in policy around employer engagement. We begin with the ‘easy and coordinated access for SMEs to find out about

services’ (Dearing 1997), through the Worry Report’s ‘need for knowledge exchange’ (2006). Leitch (2006) says that ‘skills development must be demand-led rather than centrally planned’, and that ‘We must improve the engagement between employers and universities’. Smith (2009) talks about HEIs and business doing ‘more to work together to ensure that postgraduates have the business-facing skills that employers need’. The 2011 Hodge Review (of which more

later) describes ‘systematic and frequent interactions’ and positions ‘employment needs as the driver for future development of transferrable skills training’ (2011). *Students at the Heart of the System* (2011) is a recent white paper which pertains specifically to undergraduates, but the centrality of employers as the driver for course design may well have an impact on future changes to the postgraduate environment and are in many ways an echo of Hodge. The paper talks about the need to

engage ‘actively with employers to accredit courses to indicate to students that they are valued by them’. A white paper looking at research and innovation will come out later this year, completing the new Coalition’s FE/ UG/ PG, Research and Innovation policy trilogy. It is unlikely to suggest that employers ‘accredit’ PhDs as such but it will be interesting to see how the employer-

researcher relationship is articulated. So the policy discourse moves from the assertion that there should be an interaction with ‘business’, to this interaction being influential, to the interaction with ‘employers’ driving skills development, all the way up to the suggestion that employers should accredit courses to indicate to students that the courses are valued by them. There is an implied change in the balance of power between the external

organisations and HEIs, with HEIs taking an increasingly (and contentiously so) ‘service-provider’ role and business being in the driving seat. The shift from engagement with ‘businesses’ to engagement with ‘employers’ charts the growing significance of the employability agenda. The Hodge Review in particular has given us a mandate to review employer engagement in

“There is an implied change in the balance of power between the external organisations and HEIs, with HEIs taking an increasingly (and contentiously so) ‘service-provider’ role .”

researcher development in terms of its quality and frequency. We should be doing it more often and we should be doing it better. Crucially for us as researcher developers, we should be taking the information we get from employers and using it to inform our practice. For example, if leadership is an

ongoing perceived skills gap with employers, we need to work with them to find the best way of addressing it. The ‘prescriptive’ trend identified above raises ideological questions around the role and purpose of the university. Is it our sole purpose to supply ‘oven-ready’ graduates and

postgraduates who are a near-perfect skills match for their future employers, or is there (and should there still be) an intrinsic value to research and developing minds? Do these two trends sit comfortably together or are they diametrically opposed?

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Ref 2012—The Focus on Impact and the £9,000 issue

REF 2012 - The Focus on Impact

Our academic colleagues have in the past held a wide-range of views about employer engagement and more generally skills development for employability, with some adopting the agenda wholeheartedly and others seeing it as at odds with their academic research. In the disciplines falling within ASHPIT's remit, there are those such as the vocational creative arts and media who 'do' engagement as part of their daily bread. At the other end of the spectrum, the non-vocational elements of research-intensive HEIs (such as languages) have no history of routine engagement. Whatever the current level of engagement, RCUK's decision

to give such prominence to impact and environment in the forthcoming REF means that engagement in its many forms is now writ large in the collective consciousness of our academic colleagues from all disciplines.

The £9,000 question

The focus on employability at undergraduate level heralded by the Browne Report and the subsequent 2010 white paper *Students at the Heart of the System* will also have consequences for the postgraduate environment in ways that we can only imagine. It might be that students making a £27,000 investment at undergraduate level will think more carefully about the benefits of

investing in a postgraduate degree in the Arts, especially when the figures show that over a career life-time a PhD in the arts and humanities brings no economic reward (Connor and Brown, *The Value of Graduates and Postgraduates 2009*). The changes at undergraduate level that have brought about a rise in the significance of employability and employer engagement (students wanting to know from the outset that their degree is relevant and valued by their potential employers) have the potential to filter through to postgraduate level and add impetus to the employer engagement agenda for us too.

“RCUK's decision to give such prominence to impact and environment in the forthcoming REF means that engagement in its many forms is now writ large in the collective consciousness of our academic colleagues from all disciplines.”

Challenges

The outcome of this policy context is that employer engagement is of renewed concern to all the stakeholders in HE, including students, academics, academic support staff (careers staff and researcher developers). We are all facing in the same direction. On the other hand, many of the employers that we wish to engage with, especially those in the public sector and in the creative industries, are undergoing root and branch cuts and restructures, and increasingly have neither the time nor the resources, nor the creative space to think about engagement with HEIs. As the recent AHRC *Hidden*

Connections report concludes, engagement with HEIs is often 'not relevant to their business, is not a factor in their competitiveness, they have no information on the benefits of interactions and no information on how to interact.' So we have the mandate and the impetus. But we are faced with what Harold MacMillan might have called “Events, dear boy”:

1. Employers of ASH PhD students are not necessarily 'spear-fishing' (CIHE *Talent Fishing 2010*) for our researchers and therefore have little reason to engage with the skills development of that cohort;

2. ASH PhDs are under-represented at careers-type events within many HEIs (both in the sense that at 'generic' training they are likely to be outnumbered by scientists and that a smaller percentage of ASH researchers (as a percentage of the overall ASH cohort at an institution) than STEM researchers (broad brush!) engage with the careers agenda per se;

3. Employers can find it difficult to find the time to manage engagement activities;

“Employers can find it difficult to find the time to manage engagement activities.”

“developing and sustaining relationships can sometimes seem more trouble than it is worth (on both sides of the relationship)”

Challenges continued....

4. The practicalities of marrying two potentially very different timescales (in terms of how long it takes to get things done, when is the best time of year to do things, how far things are planned in advanced and how ‘immediate’ feedback should be) mean that developing and *sustaining* relationships can sometimes seem more trouble than it is worth (on both sides of the relationship);

5. Communications: Employers often don’t know what the possibilities are (see *Hidden Connections 2010*) and, in the creative industries, they are unlikely to make the first move in establishing a relationship with researcher developers;

6. There is often a dispersal of functions within HE, amongst Graduate Schools, Business Development Executives (or TTOs) depending on your

particular institution’s terminology), Careers Services and Community Action bodies. All these functions deal in some way with external engagement and although it (possibly) makes sense to us inside the HEIs, it doesn’t make sense to those outside. Who do they contact? Why? What can they expect?

7. Employers are often not aware of what an ASH postgraduate might offer their business and what they might be signing up for in a placement as a first contact activity; Low skills expectations in certain regions and sectors mean that it is often less an issue of not *understanding* what an ASH postgraduate does, but quite simply of *not having the need* for higher skills in their (often small) workforces.

The issue of employer skills needs is an important one. One of the ways that we find

out about skills needs in potential employers is by proxy through employer surveys such as the University of Sheffield’s Survey of Employer Attitudes to Postgraduate Researchers (2006), Vitae’s Employers’ Views of Researchers’ Skills (2007), Vitae’s Recruiting Researchers: Survey of Employer Practice (2009), CIHE’s The Value of Graduates and Postgraduates (2009) and Talent Fishing: What Businesses Want from Postgraduates (2010). These surveys, although plentiful, offer their own challenges: they are not comparable - surveying different partners at different times and asking different questions; the data is rarely disaggregated down to a meaningful level in terms of researcher discipline and employers’ type of business; they are not longitudinal but instead offer ‘moment-in-time’ snapshots. As such it is difficult for us to use them to inform the skills development programmes we offer and to measure the impact of our programmes on employer-defined skills gaps.

Update on ASHPIT resource development....

We are currently working on a Public Engagement Master Class with a provisional date of November 24th in partnership with Rachel Blanc at the Vitae London Hub, and input from fellow Innovate Award-winner Sarah Davies.

We are also in the early stages of planning an online competition entitled *The History of the Object in 100 Stories*, inspired by one of the workshops at ASHPIT Day 2.

In response to the Manchester day, we will be following up leads and working towards a national ASHPIT-coordinated response to the challenge of engaging employers in routine, sustained interactions. In all cases, WATCH THIS SPACE.

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ASHPIT responses to the challenges

The outcomes of the group workshops included ideas about how we can respond to these challenges and start taking small steps to address them through access to better data and the development of better communications. Some of the ideas the group came up with included:

Top 100 ASH Employers

There was a perception that the data from employer questionnaires would be more useful if it was disaggregated. The group felt that they needed more detail about who recruited ASH researchers in the form of a top one hundred employers

(regionally and nationally);

Disaggregated data

The Vitae 3.5 years on data is useful but can raise more questions than it answers in the absence of further disaggregation.;

Translation leaflets/resources

Different professions need different skills and use different languages to describe them. Given how wide ASH researchers scatter in terms of destination sectors, the group came up with the idea of having leaflets to 'translate' ASH skills into the languages of specific sectors. An example

might be 'ASH Researcher Skills in the Language of Publishers', or 'ASH Researcher Skills in the Language of Local Government';

Joined-up and clearly mapped mechanisms for engagement

It was felt that the 'dispersal' of functions described above was confusing for potential partners and that efforts should be made to describe and publicise a 'joined up' offer from our universities (Careers, Grad School & BDE) as to what range of modes of engagement there can be between employers and Universities and who to contact.

"The group felt that they needed more detail about who recruited ASH researchers in the form of a top one hundred employers".

Conclusions and Caveats

There was some very interesting discussion and comment about the policy review. We had suggested that some of the data (see comment in the section above about Vitae Three-and-a-half years on Report) created generalisations that were not useful. Yet when we were discussing the policy and making comments about supervisor engagement with employers, or the impact of the £9,000 on the postgraduate environment, we were being equally broad-brush. As Barbara Hawkins (Director for Graduate Studies and Distance Learning from University of the West of England) said, supervisors in the creative arts and media are engaging all the time so

there isn't the cultural issue that there is in more research-intensive institutions. And Elizabeth Wilkinson (Head of Postgraduate Career Development MLP, Careers and Employability Division University of Manchester) pointed out that lower numbers at undergraduate level don't always mean lower numbers at postgraduate level. The complexity of data available to us both in policy and surveys can sometimes cause more heat than light. We are waiting for the publication of the next BIS White Paper on Innovation and Research. As such, the policy context feels volatile, and any conclusions we draw

(and planning we do as a result) could potentially mean we are building houses on sand. Add to this the fact that an increasingly small number of us is working to develop and deliver increasingly individualised development programmes for researchers that take growing account of diverse employer demands and the challenges seem great indeed. Our task is to bear all this in mind and nevertheless work towards informing our practice with 'collaborative and relational' employer engagement (Richard Brown, CIHE).

"supervisors in the creative arts and media are engaging all the time so there isn't the cultural issue that there is in more research-intensive institutions."

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Keynote Speaker—Peter Forbes, Associate Director of the Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE)



Peter began his keynote by recognising that there are no definitive answers to questions of how to embed employer engagement and ensure researchers' employability, particularly during such a turbulent economic time. At the same time, he said, the number of postgraduate students who go on to find work in fields

other than education suggests an ongoing and pressing need to equip researchers with the skills required of work beyond – as well as within - academia. Researcher developers face some fairly significant obstacles in their attempts to achieve this ends. There are **few if any employers who are specifically or exclusively interested in employing**

PGRs. Indeed, although postgraduates have a raft of skills that are highly valuable in a knowledge-based economy, Peter acknowledged that many employers do not perceive them in that light. Most of the employers he encounters are indifferent and in some cases even hostile to recruiting PGRs, with banks and

“There are few if any employers who are specifically or exclusively interested in employing PGRs.”

Postgraduates as potential employees—the employer view

financial services, in particular, often attaching little significance to postgraduate qualifications alone. Indeed **the CIHE “Talent Fishing” report, which he co-authored, found that the vast majority of employers have no particular preference to recruit from either undergraduate or postgraduate groups.** They do not necessarily attach

special value to *any* type of university degree, let alone one obtained at postgraduate level, and tend to approach the graduate market as a homogenous pool of potential employees. Equally, he pointed out, **some academics may be similarly wary of or resistant to engagement with non-academic employers; consequently just as PGRs experience no ‘pull’ from**

employers, there is no ‘push’ from their supervisors either. These problems are compounded, moreover, by the fact that the language used to discuss researcher employment has become somewhat hackneyed. As a result, whilst the issues behind it remain as urgent as ever, the vocabulary of “employability” may act as an immediate barrier to many

“language barriers to researchers’ engagement with employment might be reduced simply via a focus on “professionalism” as a richer and more emotive term than “employability”.

Employability or Professionalism?

researchers’ engagement with them. Peter suggested several possible starting points for researcher developers’ responses to these challenges. In the first instance, he proposed that some of the **language barriers to researchers’ engagement with employment might be reduced simply via a focus on “professionalism” as a richer**

and more emotive term than “employability”. Some features of researcher employment, he continued, are unique to the postgraduate sector and so merit special attention in researcher training. A key difference, for example, between graduate and postgraduate employment lies in the fact that small and medium enterprises (SMEs),

rather than large corporations, are the major employers of postgraduates. These sorts of difference are worth considering when developing training for postgraduates, but Peter also reminded us that PGR employment takes place within the much broader continuum of graduate employment. Research and resources ostensibly focussed

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New work patterns, new competencies...

on undergraduate employment may, therefore, also be of use to those working with postgraduate job-seekers.

Alongside the skills traditionally developed for employability, Peter suggested that the changing face of “work” in the 21st century demand a new set of both competencies and

career attitudes. He referred particularly to the advice given by Matthew Taylor, Chief Executive of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, that key qualities for success in the 21st century include **autonomy, empathy, universalism and a desire to do something more socially**

beneficial than just increasing profit margins. A passion for life-long learning should be encouraged, he said, as should receptiveness to new cultural experiences, a global world-view, and a strong ethos of work hard. A high degree of flexibility, openness to interdisciplinarity, and interest in collaboration

“the changing face of “work” in the 21st century demands a new set of competencies and career attitudes.”

Portfolio working as a major work pattern

should also constitute key aspects of future-oriented employability training. These attributes are especially valuable at a time when the very nature of “work” is increasingly uncertain, and when greater fragmentation and an emphasis on portfolio work seems likely to characterise work patterns in years to come.

Peter offered us two more

suggestions regarding researcher development for employability which share the theme of thinking beyond boundaries. That is, it is important: to encourage PGRs to develop an ability to articulate the skills they develop during their degrees in language which is meaningful to non-academic employers; and to help PGRs to look outside of the

‘traditional’ postgraduate career trajectories. In terms of career trajectories, he explained his belief that many people’s projections of their own career paths are self-limiting. PGRs, in particular, tend to envisage a narrow range of career options with a strong or exclusive focus on research and teaching. Part of the process of embedding employer engagement with

The need to learn how to talk about skills

HEIs and improving PGR employability is, therefore, to encourage postgraduates to consider non-academic jobs from the outset, not only as a ‘back-up’ to a preferable academic career, but as a serious alternative to jobs in education. Having convinced PGRs of the worth and validity of a career outside academia, the next step in facilitating such a career is to enable

them to translate the skills and experiences they have gained during postgraduate study into business language. There is, Peter said, **no lack among PGRs of most of the skills required for a successful non-academic career; what remains to be developed in them are the linguistic skills to convey to the business world their own worth as future employees.**

Finally, Peter suggested that **to embed systematic employer engagement into the postgraduate experience we need to work with the grain of academic interests.** Senior academics must be persuaded of the value of employer engagement and of non-academic careers; equally, researcher developers must be prepared both to collaborate with these

“what remains to be developed in them are the linguistic skills to convey to the business world their own worth as future employees. “

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Professional and intellectual development—two sides of a coin

“We need to develop work-related and work-based learning on a scale and time-frame that suits businesses themselves”

academic “Trojan horses” and to develop work-related and work-based learning on a scale and time-frame that suits businesses themselves.

Professional and intellectual development, Peter concluded, should be approached as two sides of the same coin, rather than as distinct - much less oppositional - aspects of researcher development.

Recommended Resources:

CIHE, “Talent Fishing: What Businesses Want From Postgraduates” Report (2010)

CIHE, “The Fuse” Report (2010)

CIHE/HEA, “Degrees of Skill: Student Employability Profiles” (2006)

David Clews, “Creating Entrepreneurship: Entrepreneurship Education for the

Creative Industries” (University of Brighton, 2007)

Dr Peter Hawkins, *No Regrets on Sunday* (London, 2010) and *The Art of Building Windmills: Career Tactics for the 21st Century* (Liverpool, 1999)

TED website - <http://www.ted.com/> See especially clips of **Ken Robinson** talking about the importance of creativity; **Norman Jackson** discussing “Life-Wide Learning”; **Mantz Yorke** describing his work on models of employability; and **Bill Lucas** assessing the relationship between subject expertise and professional development, to which facets of employability he attributes equal importance.

Case Study—ResearcherCurator Sarah Kerr & Dr Rebekah Smith McGloin (Job-Share Arts Graduate Centre Managers, University of Nottingham)

ResearcherCurator is an AHRC-funded programme of training and work-based learning that we are piloting at the University of Nottingham (Arts Graduate Centre.) Its aims are to: look at the scalability of work-based learning opportunities (ie can we improve on the one-placement-one-host model of work-based learning); model public engagement activities between postgraduates and the creative economy; and investigate how we can achieve different kinds of engagement with employers (and particularly the

systematic and frequent interactions recommended by the Hodge Review [2011].) The programme is funded for one cycle (two years) and we are just coming into the second year. It is a collaboration between University of Nottingham, Nottingham Trent University and the Galleries of Justice Museum. It is open to 25 postgraduates from across 5 East Midlands universities (selected on application.) In year one participants received 4 days of training on Project Management, Advanced Communications Skills,

Working with Young People in Schools, How does the museums sector understand its audience and evaluation techniques . This was delivered by a team of staff drawn from the three collaborating institutions; including specialists in transferable skills training, museum and heritage studies and curatorial practice. The postgraduates were then split into teams which had responsibility for delivering a project for the host museum. In this case the project was to devise and develop new resources for local schools that

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would enhance the existing public programme and pilot these with a group of PGCE students. At the end of year 1 the participants were encouraged to build on their experience and learning of the first year by submitting a funding proposal for their own public engagement activity with a creative industry organisation to the programme's seedcorn pot. We are currently receiving year 2 funding proposals which will be sifted by a panel of judges including the Director from the Beacon for Public Engagement at UCL. Successful proposals will be funded and the applicants will receive on-going mentoring for a year. The programme has not been without its challenges; like many pilots. The host organisation has found accommodating such a big programme a strain on resources and, although costed

in to the programme for 10 days of training delivery and mentoring, has only been able to provide three. This has meant that some of the participants have felt under-supported. Although, we, as researcher developers could backfill some of the support, a significant amount required specialist knowledge that could only be provided by the host. In addition, it was clear that the typical response times for emails were very different in the host organisation to what postgraduates were used to from their own universities. Emails would often take a week to get a response. Whilst this was a 'true-life experience' of the workplace, it was a source of great frustration to the participants. The length of the programme also proved to be a difficult commitment for some of the postgraduates to make, and eight participants failed to

complete the first year for a variety of reasons. The higher-than-expected drop-out rate was probably partly due to training days and event timings being changed half-way through the programme as a result of changes in staffing at the host museum. At the same time, the programme has been successful in a number of ways. One participant has got a job and has attributed at least part of this success to his participation in *ResearcherCurator*. Half of the remaining participants have expressed a strong interest in setting up their own public engagement projects with the creative industries. The programme host – Galleries of Justice – are delighted with the outcomes and have said that the resources will be used by up to 2000 school children visiting the Galleries next year alone.



ResearcherCurator participants showcase their material to PGCE students in History and English and get their expert opinion on how the resources will work with school children.

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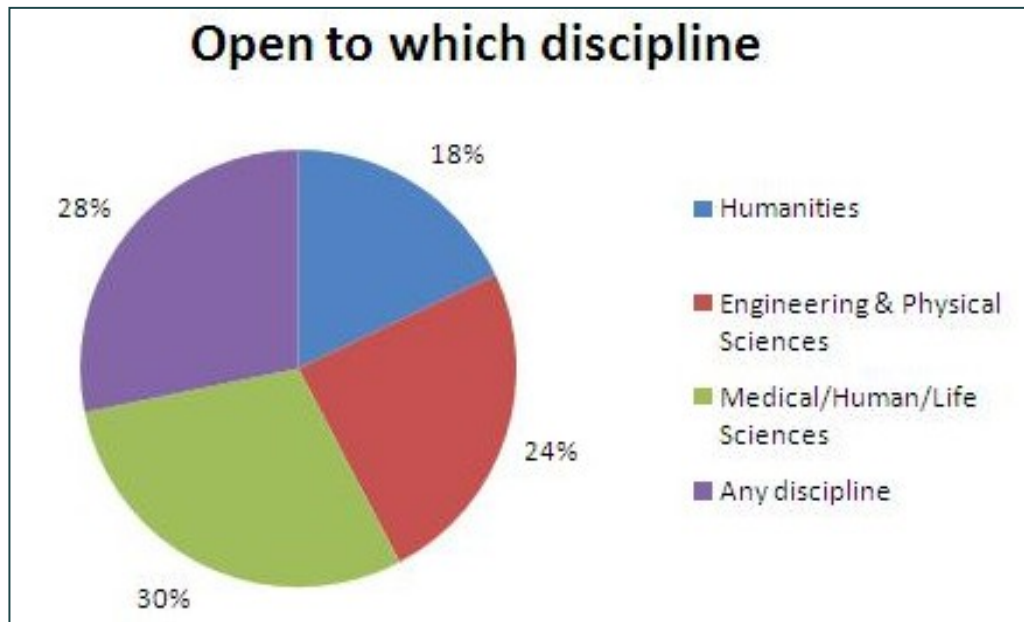
Elizabeth Wilkinson
*Head of Postgraduate Career Development
MLP, Careers and Employability Division
University of Manchester*

Elizabeth Wilkinson, Head of Postgraduate Career Development at the University of Manchester, gave a presentation about Manchester's annual Pathways event. It is a 3-day careers event, open to all PhDs and research staff (attended by up to 800 researchers). The first day involves around 80 panellists, all with PhDs, who represent themselves, not 'employers' per se and give a warts-and-all account of a variety of career paths. Delegates can attend 5 out of 37 possible panels. Attendance is around 400 postgraduates. Day 2 is a programme of Career

Workshops and has approximately 90 attendees. This year the focus was on Interviews & Assessment, Practice presentations (for job interviews), Employer-led group exercises, Psychometric tests, Academic interview panels Q&As and practice interviews. Day 3 is structured as a 'PhD Zone @ The Graduate Fair' and is part of a broader event open to undergraduates and postgraduates. Employers are offered free stands in a separate room (the PhD Zone) to encourage them to attend. There were 15 employers this year. This day was marketed to postgraduates as a "chance

to talk about how employers view PhDs" – though some have vacancies and postgraduates can access all the other "regular" employers in the same venue. PhD careers advice is also available. Attendance of postgraduates and undergraduates was almost 800 attendees this year. (For more information see www.manchester.ac.uk/pathways and <http://manchesterpgcareers.wordpress.com/pathways>.)

The biggest challenge perceived by Elizabeth is getting Humanities researchers to attend. Although Humanities PGRs make up 31%



Graphic showing how you can increase the uptake from ASH researchers by changing the way you publicise an event: Previously, Elizabeth's team advertised name of panellist and what their PhD has been in. The new system involves advertising the name of the panellist, their job title and what kind of Phds a particular job is open to.

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of the postgraduate researcher population at Manchester they are only 20% of attendees at the Pathways event. The usual complaint from humanities is “it’s all science.” In response to this feedback and to research undertaken by Manchester’s Careers Service around the career aspirations of Humanities researchers there is a big push this year to get more humanities panellists involved and to have a greater focus on academic careers. There has also been a decision to present panellists according to which discipline you need to enter their

careers rather than which discipline their PhD was in: this removed some of the on-paper science bias of the panellists and refocused the event on “any discipline” careers.

A second challenge was engaging employers in the Day 3 PhD Zone @ The Graduate Fair’ who were interested in recruiting Humanities PhDs. Elizabeth is trying to tackle this by writing an employers newsletter, Tele-selling to “known” PhD recruiters and sending an E-mail shot invitation to non-academic research collaborators. The issues to

overcome are that only employers who recruit multiple PhDs are interested in attending and many likely employers are based in London and unwilling and/or unable to travel.



The Pathways event at the University of Manchester (above). A Pathways career workshops (left) and a conversation at the careers fair (below)



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Richard Carruthers

Work Based Development Co-ordinator (PGR) Career Destinations, Student Services University of Southampton

As part of the University of Southampton deliverables to postgraduate research (PGR) candidates we offer a variety of internships and project work designed to nurture transferable skills development in a work based environment. The policy has received the backing of senior management at the University of Southampton including Pro-Vice Chancellor Professor Debra Humphris.

All internships and project work must be of value to both the host organisation and the PGR intern and include flexibility to fit around the research programme. Additionally we identify added value if the opportunity includes an element of public engagement.

During 2010 and 2011 we have run a number of opportunities with the Southampton City Council Arts and Heritage

department focused at our PGR candidates in the Faculty of Humanities. Two particular PGR internship/project work case studies are described here.

“Walk The Walls” – is a heritage interpretation project based in Southampton’s Old Town. The appointed intern (Christen Ericsson) worked part-time alongside the Southampton City Council’s Learning and Outreach

Projects Officer (Gemma Winterton) over a 10 week period during Summer 2010. The project provided a focused opportunity to redesign the walking trail and information panels around Southampton’s medieval walls and structures.

mentored by Southampton City Council’s Learning and Outreach Projects Officer (Gemma Winterton) over several months during 2010 and 2011.

Additionally to the above internship opportunities several PGR candidates volunteer with the Southampton City Council Arts & Heritage on a variety of projects including Heritage Open Days and the Tudor House Museum and Gardens.

“Loans Boxes” – is a collection of small independent projects aimed at making historical artefacts accessible to the public. The appointed interns (Jim Dolwick and Denise Remple) were tasked with creating themed historical collections and interpretation cards for use with a variety of audiences. The interns were

These opportunities have provided a fresh perspective to

both the interns and the host organisation. Our interns have commented that the practical experiences have been an essential part to their career development. Through communicating with a variety of stakeholders and working to meet the needs of their client (the host organisation) within deadline and budget constraints these opportunities have been a valuable experience which can now be demonstrated through their CVs.

“The project provided a focused opportunity to redesign the walking trail and information panels around Southampton’s medieval walls and structures.”

“these opportunities have been a valuable experience which can now be demonstrated through their CVs.”

Workshop outcomes

The afternoon workshop was a chance for everyone to talk through issues they had encountered in their own practice around employer engagement. There was also a

group who discussed the challenges of engaging humanities researchers and ways to overcome them. The main issues in both discussions centred loosely

around a lack of or poor information and difficulties in communicating information effectively.

Engaging Humanities Researchers

There were several problems identified in engaging humanities postgraduates who attended careers events far less than postgraduates from other faculties. A recent questionnaire undertaken by the University of Manchester showed that humanities postgraduates were much more committed to the idea of an academic career than postgraduates in other Faculties; yet tailoring events towards academic careers didn't succeed in attracting greater numbers. At the same time, the assumption that a non-academic career spelt

failure was a likely reason why attendance was low at events where other career options were explored. Although there are no obvious solutions, the group discussed the postgraduates' need for more information about their own training needs. This could be achieved through an early training needs analysis which could provide a context for postgraduates to trace the skills that they have acquired and the jobs (or portfolio of work) that these skills could map on to. Annual Review could be the best time to review more broadly skills

acquisitions and transition to employment. The group acknowledged that there was a need to communicate career development messages not only to postgraduates but also to their supervisors and to look at the ways in which supervisors and their supervisees communicated around careers issues in order to avoid a situation where both sides were reticent to speak openly about the 'non-academic' career path.

Employer Engagement

Drilling down further into existing datasets on who employers were and drawing together outcomes from recent postgraduate and employer surveys undertaken at an institutional level were both identified as crucial ways to enhance the kinds of information we already had so that we could develop better employer engagement in the future. A 'Top 100' ASH employers by sector and by region would be at the top of the wish list. The groups identified a role for Vitae and ASHPIT in this (and ASHPIT will

take this forward.) There was an expectation that in the future, employer engagement might be centred around placements – or they may at least be an introductory activity to the 'systematic engagement' prized by Hodge. One group-member talked about the likelihood of work experience being written in to the new AHRC Block Grant Partnership - AHRC has long espoused a broader definition of training than some other research councils. The AHRC Researcher Training Framework (2009) is explicit in

how it sees researcher training as 'encompassing all the opportunities, formal and informal, available to researchers to develop in their field as highly-qualified individuals in preparation for their future career.' Birmingham University's *Talent Pool* (a searchable database of student expertise used by local businesses) was put forward as a good example of placement activity for employer engagement. The groups also felt that there was a need for better information for employers about what skills

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Employer Engagement continued....

postgraduates had to offer. The Vitae document *Researcher Skills at a Glance* (currently being updated) is designed to provide this information but the group felt it would be helpful to develop one from an ASH perspective (again – something ASHPIT will take forward.) At an institutional level the group felt that better engagement with employers would be facilitated by better communication between Graduate Schools, Business

Development Executives/ Technology Transfer Offices and Careers Services to provide a 'menu' of engagement for employers. This 'menu' would be sensitive to different needs, working practices and timeframes of universities and employers and would include options for: attending networking events, sitting on judging panels, recruiting interns, participating in mock interviews, delivering/ receiving training, participating in business case studies and

podcasts. Communicating this kind of information to employers might be done through working with the Institute of Directors and the Federation of Small Businesses. ASHPIT will look at the feasibility of getting an article published in their newsletters or what role we could play in a sector-specific event that was relevant to ASH.

ASHPIT delegates wondered whether there could be an ASH version of the document below.



Researchers' skills and competencies

At a glance

In a rapidly changing global business environment, research, innovation and highly skilled employees are key to maintaining the competitive advantage of organisations.

Within UK higher education there are around 90,000 people studying for doctoral degrees and around 40,000 people employed as researchers. These people have high level technical skills and are also likely to have experience in effective communication, project management and team working. This experience will have been built up through a mix of training, individual study and practical work experience.

More than 50% of doctoral graduates work outside the education sector on graduating. Many more researchers seek work outside the higher education sector at different points in their careers.

This document is designed to enable employers and researchers to see at a glance the skills and competencies doctoral researchers and research staff can bring to an organisation. Against some of the competencies that are most frequently desired by employers, we list some of the relevant skills that researchers typically develop, then some real examples to show the kind of evidence that might be cited by researchers to evidence the development of those skills.

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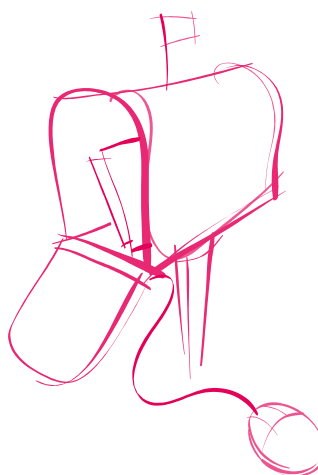
Join us for the next ASHPIT think tank day!

The next think tank day will take place on
Thursday 10th November
at
SOAS (exact location tbc)

The provisional focus is **Research Staff**, however, this might change in response to the forthcoming BIS white paper on research and innovation. If you would like to attend, please send an email registering your interest to:
ashpit@nottingham.ac.uk
by **Thursday 13th October**

Do you have a better idea of the ways in which we can engage with employers?

We will be pursuing some of the ideas that came out of this third ASHPIT day in the Autumn term and looking at how we can work towards offering any resources that result through our ASHPIT network. You may be interested in joining us to pursue funding for a collaborative bid. If you are, then please do E-mail us at ashpit@nottingham.ac.uk



You can find lots more information about the project aims and objectives on our blog:
ashpit.wordpress.com

If you'd like receive automatic notifications of updates to the blog, please subscribe using the "Sign me up!" button on the right side of the homepage.

About us

ASHPIT was set up and is run by Dr Rebekah Smith McGloin and Sarah Kerr. We are researcher developers, based in the Arts Graduate Centre at the University of Nottingham. We are supported by the hard work of a postgraduate intern and ASHPIT Project Manager, Rachel Middlemass.

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