Graduate transitions to employment: career motivation, identity and employability

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Executive summary

Introduction

This investigation of the post-undergraduate experience and emerging graduate identity evolved as a result of a Centre for Career Management Skills (CCMS) funded doctoral thesis into undergraduate students’ pursuit of careers (O’Regan, 2009). This project explores how career ideas evolve over time, whether perceptions of the labour market on the eve of graduation match experiences of the labour market after graduation and how graduates approach managing their employment and careers in the twelve months after graduation. 

The aim of this study therefore, is to explore how recent graduates manage the post-undergraduate transition and their careers and the role they perceive their higher education experience played in this process. This project, as in the original study, focuses on the life-career story of individuals and takes a constructive approach to the discussion.

Research questions

1) How do graduates manage their career in the first year after graduation?
2) How do graduates reflect on their university experience?
3) Are the four types of orientation identified in undergraduates (O’Regan, 2009) sustained post graduation?

Methodology

The methods used here replicate the research approach used in the original doctoral thesis of O’Regan (2009). Data were gathered through a series of semi-structured individual interviews with the researcher and written diary entries submitted over a period of four years from 2006-2009. There were thirty participants in the doctoral study, twenty six of whom were interviewed as part of the graduate project in 2008 and twenty two completed their project participation in 2009. This report draws on the findings of the original doctoral research but concentrates on the data gathered from the twenty two volunteers who remained involved in the project from 2006-2009. Of this group there were thirteen female volunteers and nine male volunteers studying either economics or history modules with enrolment over a range of degree courses. The final interpretive analysis and findings are based on the experiences of eight female history graduates, three male history graduates, five female economics graduates and nine male economics graduates.
Key findings

The findings of the doctoral thesis reveal four ways in which undergraduate students are orientated to pursue their careers and their futures. Of the graduates remaining in this study two were orientated to learning, two orientated to introspection, seven orientated to hesitation and eleven orientated to instrumentalism. These orientations are presented in Figure 1 below.

![Figure 1 Undergraduates’ orientation towards their future and their prospective career](image)

On the eve of graduation in 2008, all twenty two participants were interviewed about their plans and they were interviewed again a year later in 2009. The key findings of how the four different types of students fared during that transition from university are presented below:

- Those oriented towards instrumentalism were successful in realising their goals. Of the eleven graduates, six entered graduate level roles, one began an MSC programme at a Russell Group university, one began a PGCE programme and another deferred a PGCE place to gain office experience in London. All eight entering full time
employment upon graduation (2008) remained in full time employment a year later (2009).

- One of the two graduates oriented towards learning secured funding for a Masters degree (2008) and a PhD (2009) with a view towards pursuing an academic career. The other graduate oriented towards learning decides to work temporarily to save money to travel. His applications for graduate positions are unsuccessful.

- The two graduates oriented towards introspection did not apply for graduate level employment. Between 2008-2009 they both worked in various roles either on temporary contracts or doing part time work. One worked for the national minimum wage and the other doing shift work at a call centre.

- Of the seven graduates oriented towards hesitation, none were employed in graduate level roles by 2009. One enrolled on a full time MA programme, another on a part time MA programme. Three decided to do some travelling and none of those seeking work in 2008 were working in the same role in 2009. By 2009 all seven had gained employment but none in graduate level roles.

- Of the eleven non-instrumental graduates, only three males applied for graduate roles. None were successful. Feedback from employers in two cases reveals that the candidates did not seem interested in or enthusiastic about the position they had applied for.

- Of the twenty two graduates in the 2008 cohort only those identified as oriented towards instrumentalism had secured graduate level employment by 2009. There were nine in graduate roles and one was completing a PGCE (2009-2010).

**Recommendations**

1. University policy makers recognise that students are orientated towards their future employment in different ways.

2. The university does not primarily target instrumental students who are already engaged with the process of gaining graduate employment.

3. Reframe skills for employment as skills for life to include personal development as well as employment.

4. Consider integrating work-related interventions, such as skills development, labour market information, work experience, recruitment procedure knowledge into the curriculum across all degree programmes.
1. Introduction

This investigation of the post-undergraduate experience and emerging graduate identity evolved as a result of a Centre for Career Management Skills (CCMS) funded doctoral thesis into undergraduate students’ pursuit of careers (O’Regan, 2009). The foundations on which O’Regan’s (2009) research and the current project are built draw on career development theory which crosses academic disciplines; psychology, sociology and organisational behaviour, as well as international boundaries, with applied research and positional papers published in the United Kingdom, North America, and Australasia. The career literature also presents a split between how theorists focus their research, whether in the pursuit of knowledge about the ‘organisational career’ or in understanding the ‘individual career’. This project, as in the original study, focuses on the life-career story of individuals and takes a constructive approach to the discussion.

The team at CCMS was keen to follow-up on the doctoral research to explore how career ideas evolve over time, whether perceptions of the labour market on the eve of graduation match experiences of the labour market after graduation and how graduates approach managing their employment and careers in the twelve months after graduation. We wanted to explore how experiences of recruitment processes, including completing job applications and attending job interviews, and subsequent success and rejections helped to shape and reshape the original ideas of each individual. We were also keen to learn more about the experiences of individuals who chose to remain in higher education pursuing academic studies and teaching qualifications.

Our research interest lies in finding out more about the ‘process’ of thinking about career and the career ideas young people have, rather than the ‘product’ which could be interpreted as the act of making a career decision or succeeding in getting a graduate job. The evolution of career ideas and the pursuit of career, like research design, may be fixed or flexible (Anastas & MacDonald, 1994) and, like life, may be idiosyncratic and multifaceted. The experiences of recent graduates would give an insight into how their first year after graduation unfolded and how they managed, if indeed they did manage their careers. Bearing in mind that

To study career development thus means to study a moving target (the developing individual) within a changing and complex context. (Vondracek, 1990, p.38)
The aim of this study therefore, is to explore how recent graduates manage the post-undergraduate transition and their careers and the role they perceive their higher education experience played in this process.
2. Research questions

The research questions evolved as a result of the findings of O’Regan (2009) and were additionally influenced by the employability agenda.

1) How do graduates manage their career in the first year after graduation?
2) How do graduates reflect on their university experience?
3) Are the four types of orientation identified in undergraduates (O’Regan, 2009) sustained post graduation?

Before addressing these questions we need to establish the context for this particular report.
3. What does ‘career’ mean?

One of the challenges involved in investigating the career development of young people is the differing perceptions of what a career actually is. Career can be defined as a concept and a construct and means different things to different people.

A definition of career as “the evolving sequence of a person’s work experiences over time” (Arthur et al., 1989a, p.8) has proved popular because it is succinct, open-ended and accounts for both the objective or institutional career as well as the subjective and individual career (Guntz & Peiperl, 2007). However, it is important not to underestimate the potential significance of career in a person’s life. Norris et al. (1979) suggest that “a career is one’s life” (p.7) and Miller-Tiedeman & Tiedeman (1985) claims that “life is a career unfolding and, conjointly, career is life empowered” (p.223). Cochran’s (1990, p.71) thoughts are particularly significant as one’s career:

…is what would be included if one were to write the story of his or her life.

Career therefore, is made up of aspects of people’s lives which develop over time and include the developmental process, not just work related experiences and paid employment. Careers are indeed becoming more difficult to describe, explain and predict (Kidd, 1998). Following from this, talking to young adults about their lives at university, their understanding of career, their career ideas and their lives after university carries with it considerable responsibility given how career, identity and one’s life are intertwined and unique to each individual.
4. Contextualising the project

Public policies place education at the heart of social change and economic success and as a result the transitions of graduates into the workplace are currently being closely examined. The annual publication of data on student destinations ensures that higher education ‘outcomes’ remain on the political agenda. Recent empirical research into the career development of undergraduates in the UK and positional papers discussing what happens in universities have focused on higher education’s role in employability, graduate identity and the skills agenda, graduate perceptions of the labour market and the notion of qualifications, investment and value for money in a competitive graduate labour market (see for example, Holmes, 2001; Morley, 2001; Brown & Hesketh, 2004; Cranmer, 2006; Moreau & Leathwood, 2006; Tomlinson, 2007; 2008). Careers services now have an employment/employability perspective on the work they do with students, graduates and employers. Universities have responded to employers’ demands for skilled graduates ‘who can hit the ground running’ by introducing personal development planning (PDP) which attempts to replicate self-development and the appraisal process in employment and career management skills (CMS) which is designed to prepare students for employment recruitment and selection processes and equip them to manage their own careers.

This project aims to take the perspectives of those in transition into and out of higher education into account by building on the stories they tell of career ideas, work aspirations and job hunting experiences. We wish to explore and understand more about the post graduation experience in light of their undergraduate one.

4.1 Identity and lives in transition

Life and learning processes are punctuated with developmental stages, key milestones and significant transitions from and to situations, which shape individuals’ perceptions of themselves, the world and their place within it. The transition points or life stages of children and young people are more easily defined by age (Ginzberg et al., 1951; Super, 1980; Gottfredson, 1981) while adult transitions are associated with a fuzziness of life stages and different institutional role transitions (Hall, 2002). This complicated idiosyncratic process requires new ways of understanding emotional experience, expression and communication in career development (Kidd, 1998).

One of the major institutional role transitions for young people in England occurs at aged 16 when compulsory education ends. For many who remain in education the next major transition comes two years later when they move onto another transition whether into
higher education, further training or employment. At the core of this study are the experiences of young people as they approach the next major institutional transition three years later and move into employment. For young people, the key milestones are those which consolidate their sense of self and are often associated with stages of change or transition.

These two questions: ‘Who am I?’ ‘What do I want to do?’ formed the basis for the discussion on the development of young people in the original doctoral study but remain relevant in this follow-up study. When young people move from one place to another they take on new roles and new experiences and seek to establish or re-enforce their sense of self and identity. They are implementing their self-concept through life processes and learning experiences (Super, 1980; Gottfredson, 1981, 1996). Hodkinson & Sparkes (1997) in their careership theory for young people suggest that:

Career decisions can only be understood in terms of the life histories of those who make them, wherein identity has evolved through interaction with significant others and with the culture in which the subject has lived and is living. (p.33)

How one copes in new situations is to a certain extent determined by how secure one is with, what I will call, one’s ‘core’ identity. When considering adolescent and young adult development, Kroger (2004) credits developmental approaches for explaining change in a qualitative staged form, where each stage builds on what has gone before, and provides the foundation for the next (Loevinger, 1987). Kroger (2004) also acknowledges the psycho-social nature of the developing adolescent identity and the role the community plays in shaping and supporting the developing ego. In career theory terms, this echoes the influence of the community on the career development of young people which Law (1981a, 1981b) proposes in his attempt to bridge the gap between psychological and structural approaches to career development. The university in its broadest sense represents a community and as such plays a very important role in transitions to adulthood as well as transitions to employment.

Erikson (1959) acknowledged ‘identity’ as the fifth stage in an eight stage sequence of life cycle evolution which begins at birth and continues into late adulthood. The identity stage occurs between the ages of eleven to eighteen and is characterised by the polarity, ‘identity versus role confusion’ which is:
One of life’s critical crossroads in the transition to adult life; not only must this stage incorporate a trustworthy ‘I’ who has evolved as an autonomous individual capable of initiating and completing satisfying tasks modeled by significant others, but it must also transcend such identifications to produce an ‘I’ sensitive to its own needs and talents and capable of chipping its own niche in the surrounding social landscape. (Kroger, 1996, p.27, author’s own emphasis)

Critical here is the notion that one’s final identity is fixed at the end of adolescence as individuals’ move from childhood and identification with significant others to a self that sees others as separate agents which help them recognise the ‘real me’ (Erikson, 1968). When considering a young adult arriving at university, how successful they are at chipping their own niche in this new social landscape may have significant consequences for personal, social, intellectual, career development and subsequent employment. The literature on career theory focuses on transition points from school to work (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997; Roberts, 1997) but little work has been done on transition and identity as young people move from home to university. Kidd (1998) stressed the emotion involved in transition and designated it “an absent presence in career theory” (p.275) generally. How young people cope upon arrival and how they settle in and get on at university whether their ‘real me’ is either forming or fixed has implications for their well-being while there. It will also impact on whether they have career ideas, make work-related decisions, begin to manage their employability and actively plan for the future. Leaving university then becomes another transition point where individuals once more have to chip their own niche within which for many will be a new social landscape.

Baumeister (1998) identified three elements of human experience which formed the basis of ‘selfhood’ and which have parallels with career development processes.

a) reflective consciousness (self-knowledge, self-awareness and self-esteem)

b) interpersonal being (self-presentation, interpersonal processes, self-evaluation)

c) executive function (self as agent, choice and control, motivation, self determination)

These elements of human experience are particularly relevant to this research project. In career terms, as adolescents and young adults develop, they engage and interact as social beings and reflect and learn from their experiences [the interpersonal being; b], they become more knowledgeable about their abilities, interests, aptitudes and skills [reflective consciousness; a], and take action and realise their goals [executive function; c]. In this way they are establishing their identity, finding out ‘who they are’ and using these elements of human experience to facilitate their transitions into and out of university. They are, as Henderson et al (2007) describe it, in transition to adulthood and on a trajectory into higher
education. These elements are also crucial to their ability to find work and manage their careers/employability.

With regard to their working life, young people have to take responsibility for their own employment and in so doing they are in the process of creating what Meijers (1998) calls a career identity. If identity refers to how you see yourself, it is made up of your life-history and as such develops as a result of managing roles and transitions and negotiating relationships both socially and structurally. “Notions of change and transition are at the heart of current thinking about careers…and careers are work-role transitions” (Kidd, 1998, p.280). Employability has now become an extension of this identity formation as young adults expect to gain economically from their investment in higher education.

4.2 Career development and Identity

According to the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AgCAS) (undated), career development “refers to the lifelong process of forming occupational choices and moving from job to job, including courses taken and decisions made about vocational issues.” (p.2). From a theoretical point of view, career development is understood to encapsulate lifelong developmental (Ginzberg et al., 1951; Super, 1980, 1990; Super et al., 1996) and learning processes (McDaniels & Gysbers, 1992, Krumboltz, 1994; Law, 1996) which essentially combine life and career stages.

These life-career stages (Super, 1957, Gottfredson, 1981), or seasons (Levinson et al., 1978, Levinson & Levinson, 1996) of a person’s life are reflected in their personal, emotional, social, and intellectual development while they simultaneously engage in both tacit and formal knowledge acquisition and develop a sense of ‘who they are’. For Super (1963) the implementation of the self-concept in career development is most important, while Gottfredson (1996) presents an argument for career development as “an attempt to implement primarily a social self and only secondarily a psychological self” (p.181).

Identity, on the other hand, “is what we make of ourselves within a society that is making something of us” (Josselson, 1996, p.28). There is general consensus that people are complex beings working through complex processes to find who they are and give purpose and meaning to their lives. Identity forms as a result of distinct networks of relationships in which people occupy positions and play roles (Stryker and Burke, 2000). Relationships and interactions play a key role in how individuals develop a sense of who they are.
There is no such thing as an intuitively obvious and essential self to know, one that just sits there ready to be portrayed in words. Rather we constantly construct ourselves to meet the needs of the situations we encounter, and we do so with the guidance of our memories of the past and our hopes and fears for the future. Telling oneself about oneself is like making up a story about who and what we are, what’s happened and why we’re doing what we’re doing (Bruner, 2002, p.64).

As young people make the transition to higher education they take on roles and occupy positions they have never experienced before. During this transition into higher education undergraduates are increasingly asked to consider their next transition through the policy-driven, university-supported employability and skills agenda. Being able to find meaningful employment and maintain it is inextricably linked with thoughts about careers. These career decisions are acknowledged as amongst the most important decisions we make in life and entering higher education is a significant transition point in this process for all, but particularly for young people. However, careers are mainly understood in retrospect. There is after all considerable emotion associated with becoming a student (Christie, 2009). Kidd (1998) stresses the importance of acknowledging the complex interplay between judgements, feelings and actions and how we cannot isolate the “emotionalities of career from cognitions and behaviour” (p.286). Therefore, we may need to consider work experiences and opportunities to manage our working lives as a forerunner to actually having a career.

The notion of career identity is relatively new. One of the earlier mentions of career identity is based on the findings of interdisciplinary empirical research on young people growing up in four areas of Britain. In this study, identity is described as “the individual’s own perception of himself or herself generally and in specific domains, e.g. occupational identity, political identity, domestic identity” (Banks et al., 1992, p.12). Career identity refers specifically to the extent to which one’s career is central to one’s identity (London, 1983).

Individuals with stronger career identity tend to devote more resources to their careers, thereby increasing their chances of objective career success. (Thoits, 1991, p.101)
Meijers (1998) offers a more comprehensive and useful way of viewing career identity by suggesting that the developing career identity involves answering the following two questions:

- What does work mean in and for my life?
- What do I want to mean to others through my work?

Career identity acts as a cognitive compass that motivates one to actively adapt in order to create or realise opportunities that match career aspirations (Ashforth and Fugate, 2001). Interestingly, Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth (2004) identify employability as a psycho-social construct consisting of three dimensions consisting of career identity, personal adaptability and social and human capital.

- Career identity is the motivational component of employability.
- Personal adaptability included knowledge, skills, capabilities and other characteristics valued by employers. People who are adaptable can and are willing to change their personal characteristics to meet the demands of the situation.
- Social capital has to do with social networks, interpersonal skills and job search behaviour.
- Human capital has to do with age, education, work experience and training, job performance, emotional intelligence and cognitive ability.

All of these contribute to a person’s ability to obtain work and maintain employment and how much they identify with it. This bears strong similarities to the current concept of employability.

Once again, identity construction is a telling of the self, the life-story, and incorporates changes over time. “The self of the past led up to or set the stage for the self of the present, which in turn will lead up to, or set the stage for the self of the future” (McAdams 1995, p.382). The identity formation process therefore, is a key component in the growth, maturation and development of young people. How they coped in the past gives some indication of how they cope in the present and will cope in the future.

Interpretive perspectives on career place the person at the centre of the discussion. By implication the person is the sum of all their parts, including their past, their present and their anticipated futures. Following this, Khapova et al. (2007) called for a re-examination of
the subjective career given the current climate where the knowledge economy has led to an increased significance of the individual as the agent of their career and must rely less on organisational or institutional structures. A sense of self and a known identity, self-confidence and self-esteem have increasing importance in the lives of young people in transition, preparing to pursue careers and their futures in a new post-graduation work environment.

4.3 Higher education and employability

Recent literature into the higher education experience has tended to focus on preparing students for employment and their subsequent overall employability. The Leitch Review (2006) presented a vision of a highly skilled workforce which would drive innovation, leadership and management enabling businesses to compete in a global economy. One significant impact of the Leitch Review has been to promote a vision of the university as an arena where skills provide the solution to economic competitiveness. This focus on skills acquired within higher education provides a platform for the widening participation incentive which opens third level education to those with non-traditional backgrounds and will theoretically reduce social deprivation and increase mobility. Knight and Yorke (2003) acknowledge that higher education is indeed in a state of flux and faces more demands than ever before. Graduates are increasingly expected to consider the demands of the labour market and to respond to an institutional imposed employment/employability agenda whether appropriate for them and their aspirations or not.

The boundaries between higher education and the economy have become unclear and the discourse on the university experience is heavily weighted towards the relationship between learning, skills development and employability. In fact, the Higher Education Academy’s (HEA) focus is now clearly on the student experience and its relationship to the labour market. The HEA published a series of reports under the banner ‘Learning and Employability’ (2004-2008) and set up an Employability and Employee Learning (EEL) team who work to support individual practitioners and institutions to develop student employability skills and enhance graduate outcomes. This focus on skills development coupled with the encouragement of the popularisation of HE was re-enforced by the then Labour Government’s papers; Skills for Growth: The National Skills Strategy (2009) which presents the case for 75% of young people entering higher education or completing an advanced apprenticeship by aged 30 and Higher Ambitions: The future of universities in a knowledge economy (2009) which establishes a commitment to at least 50% of young people entering higher education. There is a strong emphasis on skills development within higher education to address economic performance in the twenty first century. It appears that skills relating to employment potential and overall employability are important Government drivers.
We will bring together universities, employers, HEFCE and the UK Commission for Employers and Skills (UKCES) to identify and tackle specific areas where university supply is not meeting demand for key skills and will expect all universities to describe how they enhance students’ employability. (Higher Ambitions, 2009, p.9)

It remains to be seen how the new coalition government (June 2010) will proceed with regard to these strategies.

Employment relates to having a job and being at work. Employability has been explained in different ways. Brown and Hesketh (2004), for example define employability as “the relative chances of getting and maintaining different kinds of employment” (p.25), while Knight and Yorke (2003) see it as

...a set of achievements, understandings and personal attributes that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations. (p.5)

The concept of employability emerged in the CBI’s paper Towards a Skills Revolution (1989) where the importance of individuals maximizing their skills to match the demands of the labour market is stressed. In a report prepared for the Department for Education and Employment, employability combines a number of facets of a person’s life

In simple terms, employability is about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work. More comprehensively, employability is the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment. For the individual, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess, the way they use those assets and present them to employers and the context (e.g. personal circumstances and labour market environment) within which they seek work.

Yorke & Knight (2004) separate aspects of employability into:
Personal qualities  
malleable self theory, self-awareness, self-confidence, independence, emotional intelligence, adaptability, stress tolerance, initiative, willingness to learn and reflectiveness

Core skills  
reading effectiveness, numeracy, information retrieval, language skills, self-management, critical analysis, creativity, listening, written communication, oral presentations, explaining and global awareness

Process skills  
computer literacy, commercial awareness, political sensitivity, ability to work cross-culturally, ethical sensitivity, prioritizing, planning, applying subject understanding, acting morally, coping with ambiguity and complexity, problem solving, influencing, arguing for and/or justifying a point of view or a course of action, resolving conflict, decision making, negotiating and teamwork.

This range of qualities and skills contributes to the individual’s employability, which enhances their likelihood of gaining employment (Fugate, Kinichi and Ashforth, 2004). So employability not only depends on whether one is able to fulfil the requirements of specific jobs, but also on how one stands relative to others within a hierarchy of job seekers (Brown and Hesketh, 2004). Taking the supply and demand of labour into account challenges the idea that credentials, knowledge and social status alone will guarantee a good position in the labour market.

Table 4.1 The social construction of employability (Brown & Hesketh, 2004. p.126)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>APPROACH TO EMPLOYABILITY</th>
<th>PLAYERS</th>
<th>PURISTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>Market</td>
<td>Meritocratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task</td>
<td>Win positional game</td>
<td>Technical puzzle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self development</td>
<td>Expressed through work</td>
<td>Work expression of self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career strategy</td>
<td>Maximise market options</td>
<td>Maintain career integrity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Brown and Hesketh (2004) argue that there is a clear mismatch between individuals’ expectations of employability and the realities posed by the labour market. They identify two ideal types of individuals entering the labour market. Those who will do anything to get a top job are classed as ‘players’ whilst those with more of a moral code are called ‘purists’. Table 4.1 above shows the social construction of employability as identified by Brown and Hesketh (2004).

The ‘players’ work out how to play the ‘employment game’ and do what needs to be done to secure employment including visiting their university careers service, using employer websites, researching recruitment techniques and engaging in networking. They have effectively worked out how to market themselves to employer demands. The ‘purists’ on the other hand have a different attitude.

...their whole approach to employability was characterised by ‘the me as I am’, which in turn involved the presentation of the ‘authentic’ self as opposed to the ‘competent’ self packaged by the Players (Brown and Hesketh, 2004, p.142)

In conclusion, I make the assumption that young people leaving school are in a state of transition into adulthood and their identity and sense of who they are is still forming. What they bring with them to university, in terms of who they are, will have an impact on how they engage with the new social environment. Questions of what they want to do after graduation will be influenced by how they see themselves, and how they settle in and get on, as well as the career ideas they bring with them based on their gender, family background and educational experiences. There is to a certain extent a juxtaposition of student identity and career/graduate identity. This rate of growth and personal development is unique to each individual and difficult to generalise about. However, as the discourse within higher education has moved away from thoughts about ‘career’, career choices/preferences or indeed career decision making, we see a shift towards graduate preparation for work in response to the needs of business and the economy. Universities have responded to this shift through the employability agenda and this report investigates the experiences of a small group of young people as they journeyed into and out of the higher education system.
5. Research approach

As previously mentioned, this research project into graduate identity and employability arose out of doctoral research funded by CCMS and conducted by Maura O’Regan, the author of this report, between 2005 and 2009. The strategy used in this follow-up project was to conduct a longitudinal study, taking a thematic approach to interpreting the findings which replicated the original research design used in the doctoral thesis. Before collecting the data, to comply with ethical considerations, an information sheet and consent form were prepared and passed to the Ethics Committee for approval. The data on which this project is based was gathered between April 2008 and July 2009 with additional ‘informal’ information received from some of those participating up to May 2010.

There were thirty participants in the doctoral study, twenty six of whom agreed to participate in the graduate study. The data collection methods replicated the doctoral study using semi-structured interviews and written diary entries. Twenty six undergraduates were interviewed as part of the graduate project in 2008 and twenty two completed their project participation in 2009.

As the focus of this project is on what the graduates have to say, the next section introduces them.

5.1 Introducing the participants

The twenty two participants were recruited from the original sample of thirty undergraduate volunteers who had taken part in the PhD research study conducted (2006 – 2007). There were thirteen female volunteers (Alice, Angela, Carol, Doris, Emily, Hilary, Kate, Liz, Monica, Nadine, Phoebe, Rachel, Virginia) and nine male volunteers (Aaron, Billy, Bob, Eric, James, Joe, Johnny, Miles, Neil). All names are pseudonyms.

The group of volunteers studied for a traditional semi-vocational module or degree (Economics) and a more traditional arts degree (History). Of the twenty two participants who remained to the end of the study, eleven were taking economics modules and eleven taking history modules, although enrolment covered a range of degree courses, as Table 5.1 below indicates. There were eight female history graduates and three male history graduates. The reverse is the case with economics graduates as there were five females and nine males. All history graduates were enrolled in the history department, whereas the economics
graduates represented a wider enrolment including business, politics, geography and statistics.

The gender breakdown of degree discipline is presented in Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1 Volunteers by degree course and gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree Course</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>History</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA History</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA History and International Relations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA History and Politics</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA History and English</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSc International Securities, Investment and Banking</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA Economics</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSc Economics</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA Politics and Economics</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSc Geography and Economics (Regional Science)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the twenty two volunteers, twenty one identified themselves as white British, and one as white and Asian. When asked to identify their socio-economic background in terms of the employment status of their parent, graduates were given the opportunity to provide additional information if the categories were inappropriate. Their responses are presented Table 5.2 below.
Table 5.2 Volunteers by socio-economic background and gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-economic background</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher managerial and professional occupation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower managerial and professional occupation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate occupations</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small employers and own account work</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower supervisory and technical occupation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother - ex nursery teacher now a library assistant,</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father – changes job regularly now lorry driver (Aaron)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother - routine occupation, Father - intermediate occupation,</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step father - small employer own account work (Angela)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The demographic details of those participating indicate that the majority categorised themselves within the higher level occupations. Not all of the parents of those participating had higher education qualifications but were financially secure, successfully self-employed and lived in what the graduates described as ‘middle-class’ areas and mostly in the south of England.

5.2 Developing the first interview protocol

The purpose of the interviews in the present study, conducted just before graduation in April-June 2008 and a year later in 2009 was to provide a forum to explore personal and academic experiences, their thoughts about and their plans for the future. As the volunteers had been involved in the doctoral study (O'Regan, 2009) during their second year as an undergraduate, there was already a shared personal history. Therefore, Wengraf’s (2001) ‘depth’ interviewing approach was adopted, as using this part scripted, joint engagement
approach facilitated a conversational interaction which would provide rich insightful data. The interview guidelines for the final interview in 2009 can be found in Appendix 1.

5.3 Diary-writing

For the doctoral study (O'Regan, 2009), students kept a reflective diary recording any career-related activities they engaged with. The same approach was adopted in this study and participants kept a record of what they were doing in the first year after graduation. They were further encouraged to reflect on their thoughts about those experiences. The diary entries were included to enhance the collection of information and give more depth to the study and were an appropriate method to create the narrative of those participating by allowing them the freedom and flexibility to include what they thought appropriate. The diary-writing guidelines can be found in Appendix 2. Diary entries were submitted twice, in December 2008 and during May-June 2009. There was a minimum word count given (200 words per month), but no upper limit. All graduates were given the option to submit electronically or in paper form. All chose to submit by email attachments.
6. Findings

It is important to point out that the young people who participated in this project graduated into a global recession (summer 2008) which according to the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) can be traced back to the United States of America in December 2007 and which took hold in the UK in September 2008 with the collapse of the investment bank Lehman Brothers. This has particular relevance to the students in this study, as sixteen out of the thirty doctoral participants and eleven out of the twenty two students that remained involved for the follow-up project were completing economics modules, many of them with a view to working in the financial sector. The career ideas of the participants at the start of their second year in 2006 confirm that working in the financial sector was a popular career choice. These work-related preferences and what those participating went on to do in 2008-2009 are presented in Appendix 3.

This next section commences with an overview of the main findings of the original doctoral thesis and continues chronologically as students progressed through their degree, through to graduation and a year beyond.

6.1 Telling a different story: a typology of career pursuit (2006-2007)

The findings of the doctoral thesis led to the identification of four ways in which the undergraduate students were oriented to pursue their careers and their futures. There were undergraduate students:

- who prioritised learning and enjoyed university life; those oriented to learning
- who were anxious and sometimes quite stressed; those oriented to introspection
- who were easy-going and inclined to procrastinate; those oriented to hesitation
- who pursued every opportunity and were focused on the future; those oriented to instrumentalism

The orientations of the twenty two young people who remained in the project are presented in Table 6.1 below.
Table 6.1 Undergraduates’ orientation to career pursuit (2006-2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientation</th>
<th>Names and discipline</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Billy (History), Bob (Economics)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introspection</td>
<td>Alice (History), Kate (History)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hesitation</td>
<td>Carol (History), Doris (History), Emily (History), Eric (Economics), James (History), Monica (Economics), Neil (History)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumentalism</td>
<td>Aaron (Economics), Angela (Economics), Hilary (Economics), Joe (Economics), Johnny (Economics), Liz: (History), Miles (Economics), Nadine (History), Phoebe (Economics), Rachel (Economics), Virginia (History)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The findings also revealed that students engaged with their academic experience, developed career ideas, approached making career choices, or thought about their futures in very different ways. The findings resulted in a typology of orientation to career and study. An amended version of the typology is presented in diagram form in Figure 6.1 below.

The typology indicates that those orientated towards learning and introspection place less significance on career and future graduate employment. Career has a low relevance for them.

The introspectives are too stressed to think about the future. They have significant levels of anxiety and often struggle to cope in the present. Those oriented to learning, on the other hand, came to university for the experience, particularly academic experience. They want to continue learning and are not too concerned about their career as yet. While the introspectives focus on the present, those oriented to learning think about the future and what theirs might look like but are not overly concerned about making any career-related decisions whilst completing their undergraduate degree. The instrumentalists see their career as very relevant and are very focused on the future. The hesitators are more focused on the present than the future although they recognise the relevance of career planning and think about it, but they may not act on it. They may not know ‘what’ they want to do but having a career is an important part of their life-career narrative. The instrumental students were focused on life post graduation and having a career trajectory was important to them. It appears that an instrumental student more comfortably fits within an institutionally driven employability agenda.
Figure 6.1 Undergraduates’ orientation towards their future and their prospective career

An interesting finding within the doctoral study revealed that the four types of students had varied expectations of the university experience and valued their experience differently. The responses of the thirty students in the original study to what they valued about their university experience are summarised in Table 6.2 below. These results summarise a large collection of responses over three interviews and diary entries and have been presented in table form thus to give an indication of how students prioritised what they had hoped to gain by coming to university.

The young people oriented to learning, introspection, and hesitation were more likely to value the educational and personal development opportunities offered by attending university. That is not to say that they did not value their degree as an outcome of the experience, but it was less important in how they perceived their life/career unfolding. However, the instrumentalists saw their degree as a fundamental prerequisite for gaining
Their higher education credentials were essential ‘stepping stones’ to graduate level employment opportunities. The instrumentalists intrinsically valued their education and social experience less than the other three groups mainly because their focus is very clearly on the future and their ultimate success within the labour market. Having a graduate job and being successfully perceived within the labour market held an important significance for them.

Table 6.2 What students value about the university experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientation</th>
<th>Student priorities</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning (3)</td>
<td>The education</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A degree</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Help with finding a job</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal development</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The social experience</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introspection (3)</td>
<td>The education</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The social experience</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hesitation (10)</td>
<td>Personal development</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The education</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A degree</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gaining work after graduation</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social experience</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumentalism (14)</td>
<td>A degree</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gaining work after graduation</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal development</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The social experience</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The education</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The findings of this study suggest that not all young people entering and passing through higher education are oriented to pursue their futures and their careers in similar ways and are therefore disposed towards ‘employability’ in different ways. As a colleague at CCMS once stated, ‘it’s not all about career now is it?’ It appears that while some of the students in this study saw university simply as a stepping-stone to employment, many others are more
likely to interpret it as being about learning, developing critical thinking, becoming an adult, gaining experience and skills, developing self awareness and the confidence to find work and progress within the labour market.

6.2 Thoughts about their HE experience on the eve of graduation

All twenty two participants were interviewed just prior to their graduation in July 2008. Their reflections on what they have gained from university,’ what they have now, that they didn’t have before’ make for some interesting reading. There is more certainty about what the economics students say they have gained. The history students are more ambivalent about what it has meant to them to study for a degree, although they tend to be positive about the higher education experience generally.

The economics students describe how their thinking about life and the world has changed. Their thoughts about current affairs and politics have been informed by their academic studies and they are generally more analytical in their approach to what they read and hear.

I don’t think economics is a very personal subject. But yeah it has sparked my interest in things. I keep up with world affairs and politics. I always did but even more so now.

Aaron BA Economics interview 2008 (instrumentalist)

...just generally it’s interesting... if you hear a business correspondent talk about something you can understand it...It means you’re more informed. I think definitely you’re more informed -yeah that does make a big difference.

I think I’m more analytical...I won’t just accept something because I’ve had to read more than one side of things and not that I was really naïve before but I think I wouldn’t just necessarily take something at face value.

Eric BA Economics interview 2008 (hesitator)
A BSc in Economics...I've learned how exciting it is and how lucky I am to have an education and how I'm one of the very few people in the world who is in this fortunate position to be able to come to university and study and I'm going to use it and I'm going to make the most out of it.

I'm a completely different person...I feel much more secure in myself at the end of this degree and I'm not sure how much I'd attribute that to academic studies and the things I've done outside and living on my own, but definitely those three together have made me a much more 'wholer' person than I was before university.

Hilary BSc Economics interview 2008 (instrumentalist)

Phoebe, an instrumentalist confides that she would prefer to be a hesitator or a learner so she could 'take her foot off the pedal and relax a little'. She is the only economics student who feels she had not gained very much from her degree. She 'couldn't even talk to someone for more than 15 minutes about' it. 'It's just gone in one ear and out the other'. She thinks it has been for her 'pointless' but although she has enjoyed the social aspect of university and she has 'developed some new skills and stuff', she 'regrets' the course she chose (Interview 2008).

The history students were more inclined to talk about personal and social gains and their skills development, rather than any academic gains that come about as a result of their degree.

Yeah I definitely I said it before, definitely like organisational skills ... in each term were specifically based on skills exercises so it was just like analysing what you're reading ... things like graph analysis, group presentations...reviewing books, things like that so even though its directed at that sort of thing I think whatever I do decide to do or something those skills I learnt in there were really helpful.

Carol BA History interview 2008 (hesitator)

In the PhD study on which this project is based having a degree carried a different significance for the participants as they entered the mid-point of their studies in second year (refer back to Table 6.2). As they come to the end of their studies there is, for some, a shift in attitude which is linked with how certain they are about what they are going to do after graduation. Doris, a history graduate is finding it difficult to find employment and
It made me feel like I’d done a pointless degree as I didn’t have a firm area to go into and very few job prospects

Doris BA History & English diary December 2008 (hesitator)

Monica, an economics student, in an interview in 2008 just before her graduation says

It's really not the end of the world for me if I don’t get an amazing job straight away.

She gets a job working in a hotel during the summer after graduation where accommodation is provided but she is made redundant. After a period on unemployment benefit she reflects on her degree and writes in her diary that

… [It] does sometimes make me feel like the last three years have been a complete waste of time. I really hope I can get something out of my degree, it’s quite disheartening…

Monica BA Economics interview 2009 (hesitator)

She reflects some more on her situation and the role her higher education credentials play in her competing for work in a problematic labour market and emails her thoughts

I’m not sure my degree and university did prepare me too much for life. It did in the sense of having your own independence, but I haven’t really used my degree once in the workplace. I guess when I go on training courses I do have that student approach to things, whereby I take lots of notes and annotations and learn things quite thoroughly - as it’s obviously staying in! Apart from that I’m not really too sure how much it's helped. Maybe in the future having a degree will make me stand out in terms of a job application, but I seem to get the impression degrees really aren't all that at the moment because so many people have them. We will see though!

Monica BA Economics email April 2010 (hesitator)

For the participants in this longitudinal study, the value they place on their degree and their academic experience as opposed to their personal and social development is closely linked
with success in the labour market, particularly for those who are actively involved in graduate level job hunting. Eric, a hesitator values his degree

A degree I think will be definitely important, just having a bit of paper that says you have a degree is going to make a difference, maybe less than it did 20 years ago but it is definitely going to help and hopefully it will be the right kind of degree, if it’s not it’s still a degree isn’t it at the end of the day.

Eric BA Economics interview 2008 (hesitator)

Having a degree is important, but on the eve of graduation Eric admits that he has thought about doing a Masters in ‘something like building surveying’ deferring entry until 2009 as he really wants to go travelling so he will ‘work, save, scrimp and save, do whatever I can to get £4000 in 6 months. Then go travelling for about 4 months’.

Eric is not alone in this plan. The findings show that for some of the young people, particularly hesitators and to a lesser extent the learners, the recession provided a reason or an excuse to remain in higher education or go travelling. From my discussions with these students, remaining at university to take a higher qualification or to take some time out to go travelling are desired activities anyway, but the recession gives them the opportunity and perhaps ‘permission’ to pursue them rather than enter and have to compete in a crowded and competitive graduate labour market. Many of the non-instrumental students hesitate to engage in the graduate recruitment process because they are still unsure about what they want to do, even on the eve of graduation. Interestingly, referring back to their career ideas in 2006 (see Appendix 3) all bar two of the graduates have considered what career they want to pursue but on the eve of graduation what they can or want to apply for is less certain.

For the instrumental students, a degree is very important particularly as this group of students are motivated by having a degree to gain employment in the first instance in order to have an advantage in the graduate labour market. The instrumentalists are more inclined to have made career related choices and have a clearer idea of what they want to apply for than the other groups. These graduates are also aware that a degree is closely linked to taking professional qualifications (Associate of the Institute of Chartered Accountants, ACA) and teaching qualifications (Postgraduate Certificate in Education, PGCE).

As expected, those orientated towards introspection are concerned about their future and completing their degree is tinged with anxiety and stress because it is associated with another transition. They want to find work as a next step in their personal development and
their journey towards independence but hold off applying for graduate opportunities applying instead for administrative work or temporary work, for which a degree is not required. Kate (a History student) has not ‘managed to find a job yet, but I’ve taken my time to look at things and I know there’s a risk in doing that’ but she is returning to her home town where there are not a lot of graduate positions anyway and she will apply for what she describes as ‘student’ type work experience. Interesting for Kate her higher education experience has only been a starting point of her road to adulthood. Leaving university

...will be good to start on the rocky road of independence and start sort of building some kind of career and focusing on myself and developing as an individual I think.

Kate BA History & English interview 2008 (introspective)

It is interesting to consider how what Eric and Kate along with the other participants said they were going to do on the eve of graduation and what they actually went on to do in the intervening year differ. These finding are presented below in Tables 6.3-6.9 and are grouped according to their original orientation to career pursuit.

Both ‘learners’ in the study (Table 6.3) are interested in making plans for the next twelve months. They pursue what they want which are not clearly career focused or concerned with future employment opportunities or thoughts about their employability. Bob, in particular is unconvincing at interviews for graduate roles. Feedback from prospective employers confirmed that his ‘enthusiasm’ to work for their particular firm did not come across. The employers are not convinced he wants the roles he applies for.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientation</th>
<th>Student /Module</th>
<th>Plans post-graduation</th>
<th>Career 2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Billy (history)</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Funded PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bob (economics)</td>
<td>Travel – will apply for graduate roles in finance on return</td>
<td>Is unsuccessful in graduate applications – does temporary work in administration – thinking of unpaid internship with local MP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The two students oriented towards introspection (Table 6.4) differ in their approach to leaving university. Alice remains focused on becoming a journalist and when she receives a lower second degree classification decides to use a small inheritance to fund a journalism course through a private college. Kate on the other hand decides that her experience at university was ‘too painful’ and she wants to take her time to become more centred before pursuing a career. Her reluctance to apply for graduate type roles is, as with other graduates (mainly hesitators) compounded by the fact that she does not know what she wants to do. She decides to apply for non-graduate roles as she would gain more experience, have an income and have time to reflect on her life. Both Alice and Kate moved back home.

When participating in the original doctoral thesis, the students oriented towards introspection concentrate on their transition to university and are not positioned to contemplate their career. The compulsory credit bearing career management skills module they complete as part of their second year programme is not popular with them because it forces them to think about careers and the future. Over the course of her involvement, Alice comments that the module ‘as a whole has been useless in helping’ her ‘to decide which career is best for’ her. She was also ‘a bit puzzled by why they wanted’ them ‘to do it now’. Kate feels that the module caused her some anxiety and commented

> Not everyone is career driven and I suppose people who aren’t particularly career driven who do feel like they are drifting a bit like me. They will look at it and say – it just represents to me everything you don’t know yet that’s why you don’t like it. You don’t appreciate how it could help you – ‘cos it’s such a general thing… Not that it can’t help you… you have to be in the right frame of mind for it to help you.

Kate in an interview 2\textsuperscript{nd} November 2006

Universities make the assumption that all students are career driven and are in the right frame of mind to engage in pursuing and preparing for graduate opportunities.

### Table 6.4 ‘Introspectives’ plans for future and career journey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientation</th>
<th>Student /Module</th>
<th>Plans post-graduation Summer 2008</th>
<th>Career journey 2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introspection</td>
<td>Alice (history)</td>
<td>Applying for journalism courses and temporary work</td>
<td>Journalism applications unsuccessful. Applies for non-graduate roles. Working for the NHS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kate (history)</td>
<td>Not sure what she wants to do applying for non-graduate roles</td>
<td>Working in a call centre and volunteering in an archive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The students oriented towards hesitation approached their post graduation life-career in a similar way. Table 6.5 shows that Neil is the only one who decides to complete a Masters degree full time and thus postpones his job hunting for another year. Interesting to note here is that Neil is particularly negative about the compulsory credit bearing career management skills module he completes as part of his second year and frames his comments in relation to his participation in the doctoral study. He found the module …frustrating, as has everyone I have talked to about it. The only skills we seem to be developing are how to write something quickly enough, without thinking and with enough buzzwords to please the markers. It seems very much like this has been forced upon us and is a distraction away from our actual work. It seems very business orientated and although it serves a good purpose it is very frustrating to have to do these tasks just when the rest of our work is mounting up. I also find that although it is encouraging us to ask and seek further advice it is essentially just down to us what we write and due to the large numbers going through the system we can get away with writing anything. I know personally that through writing these diary entries and interviews I have found much more help than any careers management task or lecture I've been too.

Diary 15th March 2007

Emily’s situation from 2008 to 2009 does not change much as she decides to complete her Masters part time and work part time in a museum. In 2009, the remaining students, Carol, Doris, Eric, James and Monica have moved on and none are doing what they said they planned to a year after graduation. This group are most likely to have travelled, drifted and been less committed to graduate recruitment processes.
Table 6.5 ‘Hesitators’ plans for future and career journey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientation</th>
<th>Student /Module</th>
<th>Plans post-graduation Summer 2008</th>
<th>Career journey 2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hesitation</td>
<td>Carol (history)</td>
<td>Not sure – Australia to work as Estate Agent</td>
<td>Returned to UK works in major retail store as a sales assistant Applies for PGCE but is a late application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Doris (history)</td>
<td>Museum/heritage work MA (p/t)</td>
<td>MA postponed Working in university administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emily (history)</td>
<td>MA (p/t) Museum/heritage work working part time in museum</td>
<td>MA (p/t) Museum/heritage work working part time in museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eric (economics)</td>
<td>Travel - may do MSc in Real Estate or Building Surveying</td>
<td>Working for internet provider – not sure what to do next</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>James (history)</td>
<td>Travel - considering the Royal Air Force</td>
<td>Training to be a paramedic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monica (economics)</td>
<td>Applying for administrative roles</td>
<td>Working for the ambulance service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neil (history)</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Applying for administrative roles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The instrumental students are very focused on the future and are keen to pursue their career goals. They are as Kate describes ‘career driven’ a concept, she does not identify with. The instrumentalists take every opportunity to gain an advantage in the competitive graduate recruitment market. Table 6.6 shows that a significant number of instrumental students are realising their career aspirations a year after graduation. Phoebe, who wishes she was a hesitator or learner so she could take her foot off ‘the pedal’ on the eve of graduation begins to demonstrate ‘hesitator’ behaviour and changes her mind. She rejects the opportunity to train as an accountant and takes a risk by going to work overseas. By our final interview she has returned to the UK and is looking for work in an administrative role to gain further work-related experience. She is still unsure about what she wants to do.
Table 6.6 ‘Instrumentalists’ plans for future career journey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientation</th>
<th>Student /Module</th>
<th>Plans post-graduation Summer 2008</th>
<th>Career journey 2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instrumentalism</strong></td>
<td><strong>Aaron (economics)</strong></td>
<td>Graduate level role successful application (planning)</td>
<td>In same employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Angela (economics)</strong></td>
<td>Graduate level role successful application (market research)</td>
<td>In same employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Hilary (economics)</strong></td>
<td>MSc (Russell group university) – to work in development economics</td>
<td>Health Economist in South America (Overseas Development Institute)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Joe (economics)</strong></td>
<td>Propriety Trader (investing employer’s money)</td>
<td>IT/Financial Recruitment consultancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Johnny (economics)</strong></td>
<td>Graduate scheme in finance – completing ACA</td>
<td>In same employment</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Liz (history)</strong></td>
<td>Gap year working in recruitment – PGCE 2009</td>
<td>PGCE</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Miles (economics)</strong></td>
<td>Graduate role – City Trader</td>
<td>In same employment</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Nadine (history)</strong></td>
<td>Students Union Sabbatical Officer</td>
<td>Administrator with a Sports Relief Charity</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Phoebe (economics)</strong></td>
<td>Rejects graduate scheme in finance (ACA) – not sure what to do</td>
<td>Worked overseas, returned to UK working in an administrative role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Rachel (economics)</strong></td>
<td>Graduate level role successful application (finance)</td>
<td>In same employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Virginia (history)</strong></td>
<td>PGCE</td>
<td>Secondary School Teacher</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Liz reflects on having a degree and although she has enjoyed her time at university, her involvement with the Historical Society and other extra-curricular activities is more beneficial to her than what she gains academically.
I don't understand what a degree means because there's so many of them. What makes it good?

Liz BA History interview 2008 (instrumentalist)

However, she is very aware that if she is to realise her longer term goal of being a teacher she needs a 2.1 degree classification to be accepted onto a PGCE course.

In summary, it appears that patterns of behaviour exhibited as undergraduates are perpetuated on graduation. The instrumental students are more likely to realise their aspirations despite the recession. The introspectives and learners are taking their time and in most cases trying different opportunities with only a few applying for graduate roles. Those taking Masters courses, with the exception of Hilary, who knows what she wants to do, are facing post-graduation career decisions one year on. Hilary, an instrumentalist, chooses her degree course and her university carefully in order to increase the likelihood of her higher education credentials helping her fulfil her career goals. The hesitators continue to procrastinate and take their time to decide what to do. That is not to say that they are not working and gaining experience, they just do about it in their own way and in their own time without the urgency exhibited by the instrumental graduates. They are however, not represented in the graduate labour market.

6.3 Anticipating the next year

As the undergraduates prepared for graduation their thoughts about the future fell into two categories. Those who are excited about the challenge ahead and feel it is time to move on from university and those who are slightly concerned that as they have not gained employment, they have wasted their time. As previously stated, Doris, in her diary reflected that she had done a pointless degree as she did not know what she wanted to do and had very few job prospects.

However, when asked about what is exciting them about the future, many speak of their independence first and then finding their own place to live, earning money and for some, mainly the hesitators, going travelling. Those who have secured employment are particularly excited about the possibility of moving away, becoming more independent and having a regular income. They are looking forward to the new challenge. Interestingly of those oriented to introspection only Alice seems concerned about what the future will hold. She is worried about getting a job, breaking into journalism, going back to live at home but also feeling an obligation to do so, as her mother lives alone. Kate, the other introspective
on the other hand, is looking forward to the future after a relatively unhappy time as an undergraduate student. ¹

Just that there's so much possibility...I'm looking forward to getting a degree because I'll have a degree, wow, (laughter)... but exciting future, maybe travelling. Being the person I could be...

At university she ‘developed a high level of reading’, ‘a high level understanding’ and post-graduation she is looking forward to ‘being able to enjoy that intellectual stuff’.

What is interesting is that for those young people on the eve of graduation there is so much hope about the possibilities of what the future could bring. However, it is not the case for one of the very focused and instrumental students Phoebe as previously mentioned. She had secured an internship in her second year and subsequently been offered the opportunity to join the graduate scheme for the same large financial services company. They also asked her to become their ‘ambassador’ on campus. During our pre-graduation interview in May 2008, Phoebe is thinking of rejecting their offer to complete her ACA training with the firm. She feels

as it’s got nearer the time I’ve been panicking a bit just cos I started to think well maybe I rushed into making a career decision in my second year which was quite early I think now. At the time it felt great because like the No. 1 firm accepted me to go and work for them and they were just so big in my head cos they were always round campus and stuff so I’ve just been thinking to myself recently ‘do I actually want to be an accountant?’

She begins to think about other possibilities and

...went along with one of my friends to a Careers Fair just to see what other opportunities there were and I just saw some jobs and heard of opportunities and I thought oh well I never even looked into that before so I felt a bit like well hang on, have I rushed into this decision here. And then I thought well do I actually want to be an accountant. And it just started from there and it’s just been going through my head the whole time and I don’t know what to do...

¹ Refer to original doctoral thesis, O’Regan, M. (2009) Career pursuit towards an understanding of undergraduate students’ orientation to career, PhD University of Reading, Chapter 3, pp 65-78.
Similarly, Johnny (Economics), another instrumental student accepted onto a graduate scheme as the result of a successful internship, has a rethink when the contract comes through the post.

when I got it through the post I sort of looked at it and- I don’t know what it was-there was this sudden sort of doubt that overcame me I didn’t know what - I think it was just because it - it had just gone so quickly and then all of a sudden-you know I expect a lot more to kind of some sort you know to start and I don’t know what I was expecting but um I had a real kind of moment of doubt where I thought ‘God is this what I want?’ You know? I phoned up my parents and they were just sort of saying well you know it’s a contract obviously but if you go into it and you don’t like it you can always change but the training itself is you know so worth doing

Johnny describes how even though he has secured a graduate role, it is in one of the regional branches of the company and wonders whether he would have been better holding out for a position in the London office or with another company in London. As a result of these doubts he continues to look at other vacancies and applies for one with a company he considers ‘ethical’ in its approach to business. He remains with the original company and begins his ACA training. In his interview in 2009 he observes that although he is on a graduate scheme, he, along with his peers in the company ‘still live like students’. They live in rented accommodation, attend college, and compete against each other on the training scheme. He feels that his life has not changed that much other than having to wear a suit for work.

I consider myself as a graduate but I don’t consider myself an adult yet either; a proper adult really. The only sign of being an adult which I don’t like is being taxed and having to pay a lot of that but that’s the only thing. I just don’t feel like it’s; I don’t feel like I’ve moved on enough from being a student. Maybe because of going to college as well, that brings an aspect of being a student because you go into college in your own clothes so it’s very much like university.

In their anticipation of the year after graduation, the graduates are hopeful about their future and are keen to move on with the next phase of their lives. The reality of their year post-graduation is positioned within feelings of uncertainty, anticipation and potential.
In summary, the graduates who were focussed on their post-graduation labour market experience whilst undergraduates engaged actively in securing graduate opportunities. Most were successful. Those who procrastinated and were unsure about what they wanted to do whilst still undergraduates engaged less actively with the graduate labour market but were testing the waters of employment opportunities to gain experience and an insight into the type of the work they might want to do. Those remaining to complete higher degrees fell into two groups; those with clear career direction and those who were postponing entering the world of graduate work. Those who had been anxious as undergraduates approached the graduate labour market with caution and instead of managing their employability were managing their sense of well-being.

6.4. Summary of the main findings

The main findings can be summarised as:

- Those oriented towards instrumentalism were successful in realising their goals. Of the eleven graduates, six entered graduate level roles, one began an MSC programme at a Russell Group university, one began a PGCE programme and another deferred a PGCE place to gain office experience in London. All eight entering full time employment upon graduation (2008) remained in full time employment a year later (2009).

- One of the two graduates oriented towards learning secured funding for a Masters degree (2008) and a PhD (2009) with a view towards pursuing an academic career. The other graduate oriented towards learning decides to work temporarily to save money to travel. His applications for graduate positions are unsuccessful.

- The two graduates oriented towards introspection did not apply for graduate level employment. Between 2008-2009 they both worked in various roles either on temporary contracts or doing part time work. One worked for the national minimum wage and the other doing shift work at a call centre.

- Of the seven graduates oriented towards hesitation, none were employed in graduate level roles by 2009. One enrolled on a full time MA programme, another on a part time MA programme. Three decided to do some travelling and none of those seeking work in 2008 were working in the same role in 2009. By 2009 all seven had gained employment but none in graduate level roles.

- Of the eleven non-instrumental graduates, only three males applied for graduate roles. None were successful. Feedback from employers in two cases reveals that the
candidates did not seem interested in or enthusiastic about the position they had applied for.

- Of the twenty two graduates in the 2008 cohort only those identified as oriented towards instrumentalism had secured graduate level employment by 2009. There were nine in graduate roles and one was completing a PGCE (2009-2010).
7. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that graduates manage their careers in different ways, value their higher education differently and not all are motivated to join the graduate labour market. Their transition to adulthood and into employment varies considerably and becoming employable is not a goal they were all striving to at the time of their participation in the project. They are indeed a “moving target” (Vondracek, 1990, p.38) and forging identities within a society that is “making something” of them (Josselson, 1996, p.28). Their identities however, just after graduation are not exclusively tied to their success in the graduate labour market. They have chosen different paths to becoming financially secure or are planning for their futures.

7.1 How do graduates in their first year after graduation manage their employability?

The young people in this study are in the process of what Tomlinson (2008) refers to as ‘creating their own narrative of employability’. The initial analysis reveals that the narrative of employability for the graduates varied considerably and is reflected in how they are orientated to their futures and their careers as identified in the initial PhD project (O’Regan, 2009).

Revisiting how graduates construct, understand and begin to manage their careers and their employability, I have identified some key points to consider with reference to particular cases identified also by their orientation.

7.1.1 Alice (an introspective)

There are two aspects to Alice’s construction of her career; what she does to earn money and support herself which she does not consider to be a career and what she aspires to do as a career goal which is clearly identifiable as a traditional profession. Alice has constructed a career that is most likely unrealistic and unattainable for her. She has stuck with her aspiration to become a journalist and continues to pursue it despite not getting a 2.1 degree, struggling on her journalism course and finding it difficult to get work experience. She applies for a post at the newspaper where she is doing her work experience and is unsuccessful. In terms of managing her employability, she is not doing this in the way that Tomlinson (2008) describes. She is focussed on getting work so she has an income and is occupied and is not bored. She is constructing her career around work that she does not find particularly interesting or stimulating and is not constructing a narrative of employability that the university would consider graduate-level. In the year after graduation she is
working for the minimum wage and doing work that is routine and repetitive. She does not need higher qualifications to do this type of work. If we see work as “an ongoing social process of engagement with the labour process” (Tomlinson, 2007, p.287) Alice is an example of a graduate with limited ability to capitalise on contacts gained through her undergraduate course or on journalism contacts gained through her work experience at three different publications. She has not considered an alternative plan and is likely to drift through temporary positions in the public sector until offered something more permanent.

7.1.2 Carol (a hesitator)

Carol, on the other hand, appears to drift and has not constructed a narrative of employability suggested by Tomlinson (2008). She is also perhaps like Alice somewhat unrealistic or naïve about her future. ‘I think if I needed to be in a graduate job, I would be.’ She is able to postpone moving on (pursuing full time employment) as she is relatively comfortable financially (she has ISAs), has the support of her father and is distracted by her mother’s move to Australia. Will she still in the UK? Will she move to Australia? Her work in a major retail store is interrupted by a trip to Australia and her desire to work in an estate agency is replaced by her interest in teaching. There is little urgency in her approach to her future. She applies for teaching without any relevant work experience and her application is last minute. She drifts back to the retail store.

...if the worst comes to the worst I will try and stay at [name of store] but I don't see that progressing and so...if not see if I can get some experience in the City like stock broking and market making and that sort of thing...I always said I wouldn't do it but if it is for a year and I think if it is for experience... My aim is to get really rich and then I will buy a flat next to where I work because I hate the tube. And so my aim is if I did ever end up in the City permanently I said to dad I would have to live in London, which I wouldn’t want to do anyway there is no way I could cope with the tube.

She continues working at the retail store while doing one day a week in a primary school. She appears content in retail as it is ‘a means to an end. It’s got me the money to go to Australia’. She has not considered applying for the retail store graduate training scheme and rationalises it thus ‘I think unless you somehow get in on a higher level or you’ve worked somewhere else, it does take a while to go up and I don’t have the patience for it.’ According to Tomlinson (2008) a heavy emphasis is placed upon the need to develop a narrative of employability that encompassed experiences and achievement outside their degree. While Carol worked throughout her degree during term and holiday time and was an active member in a university society, she does not transfer this to any application for graduate positions.
7.1.3 Liz (an instrumentalist)

Liz is in contrast to Alice and Carol because she is focused on her future and is driven to realise the goals she sets herself. She is managing her employability, while at the same time pursuing her career by trying different work roles rather than applying for graduate roles immediately after university. In our first interview in 2006 she states that she wanted to progress within the teaching profession and chooses to take a year out before applying for her PGCE. ‘I always thought I would hate an office job, but I just want to try it and see’. Her post-graduation role in London gives her office experience and over the year a clearer view of the world of work and what it is like to work in a professional environment.

This one’s a very professional environment where you just can’t; you just have to take everything people say even if it offends you on the chin...I’ve definitely developed my - I’d say, I don’t know if it’s my professional skills at working in the office environment...you just have to be really professional...I would say actually I’ve learnt a lot more in this past year … from a work perspective than I have done in the past three years at university.

She wants to become a teacher and has been accepted onto a PGCE programme. She has set herself the target of being a head teacher by the time she is 45. Unlike Carol she has consistently been working towards her goal of being a teacher. She went to her mother’s school (for learners with special needs) for 2 weeks, visited schools on a government sponsored scheme and went back to her old school for a week. Prior to coming to university she was a Brownie leader. She has added value to her HE credentials as she feels that having a degree alone

...doesn’t make you stand out. If you have got no experience behind you, it’s [the degree] not going to make you stand out from anyone else. It’s the working environment you need to get into rather than just getting as many qualifications behind you as you can.

In this way she is more like the participants in Tomlinson’s study (2008) where students increasingly saw the need to add value to their higher education credentials in order to gain an advantage in the labour market. She also thought strategically about the History modules she took, medieval and early modern history, Greek and Roman history. ‘I hope that’s [choosing those modules] going to be an advantage for me’.
Her experience in her post graduation position has given her an insight into being a professional which has begun to permeate through to her life generally, which contributes to her overall employability.

Especially for business and I suppose for teaching...you definitely need to have a very sort of professional front on you that people respond to and that people are going to, you know, that they’re going to want to see more of you from this business or this professional front that you have on and that is something that you would only ever learn from being in the workplace. It’s nothing you’re going to get from being at university at all because it’s just the environment isn’t right for it and also it did take me, I’d say it probably took about six months to get this shall we say professional persona that I probably even take into my personal life now.

She has mixed feelings about her degree as she believes in the value of other experience, such as work experience, extra curricular activities, volunteering, initiative, confidence and professionalism help you stand out in a competitive graduate labour market.

7.1.4 Hilary and Nadine (instrumentalists)

In contrast to Alice and Liz, Hilary and Nadine bring something different with them to university. Prior to university they both volunteered in Africa (Nadine – Tanzania, Hilary – Zimbabwe) and during the summer of their second year they volunteered in India. Hilary is intrinsically motivated by her values and believes in putting something back into community and society and combat third world poverty. Nadine is politically motivated and describes herself as an activist, campaigning against war, global warming and other causes. The exposure to different cultures and willingness to step into the unknown (albeit through professional organisations) gives them an insight into work, labour, responsibility and commitment which results in a perspective that is different from others in the project without that experience. They both take different routes after graduation with Hilary strategically choosing to complete a Masters degree in developmental economics and Nadine remaining at university as a sabbatical officer.

Nadine in particular shows very clearly during her first year after graduation that she is beginning to manage her employability through her keen observations of how strategies are implemented and operationalised across organisational structures. Her degree in history ‘was a means to an end rather than part of a journey’. She recognises the positional value of a degree, particularly a 2.1 as a starting point for the type of careers she aspires to. ‘If you want to achieve then you’ve got to go through to university and that’s sort of the cut off.’ ‘If you don’t have a
degree, you’ll get to a point where you won’t be able to get any higher’. She sees her transition into work as her ‘grown-up adult life’. Her role as sabbatical officer will give her a longer term advantage in the competitive labour market.

…one of my reasons for going for this is that it is like a fantastic first job in that there’s so much that you can do and the skills that you’ll get from it and the experience probably far exceeds anything that you could get as a graduate going into a job. It’s a nice launching pad into campaigning and the NGO world and third sector jobs.

She realises that she has advantage in the labour market because

...just sitting on high level committees … and giving speeches and all that, it’s a lot of experience that you can get really quickly whereas if you were in another job then you’d probably be like photocopying and making tea for quite a few years before you’d maybe gain that sort of expertise.

When she reflects on her working life a year later she describes having developed a ‘professionalism’ that helps frame her narrative of employability. She has benefitted from residential training courses on leadership, attending national conferences, managing budgets, sitting on committees, and coping with staff shortages. These challenges and experiences have increased her understanding of how organisations work and she has also used the opportunity to her advantage. She realises she was ‘punching above her weight’ but pushes through and her resilience stands her in good stead.

7.1.5 Bob (a learner in the original doctoral thesis)

Bob, who enjoyed the academic and social side of being in higher education, is not as strategic as the instrumentalists in managing his employability. As he approaches graduation he is demonstrating characteristics more reminiscent of a hesitator than one committed to learning new things and embracing academic challenges. In his interview in 2008, he tells a story of a year post graduation which will involve working in temporary posts, three to six months travelling and his
…parents are going away for eight months and they’re kind of expecting me to be at home to look after the house and the garden and stuff when they are not there – which is annoying in a way – but at least I get to live at home rent free.

Before graduation he admits, ‘I’d like to say that I’m more organised but I’m probably less organised now than I used to be’. Instead of driving for a high degree classification he has reduced his expectations.

I think that maybe I’m a bit sort of relaxed about achievement I suppose…coming to university I thought- sort of- well like for A-levels just work hard and you could get the grades - good grades fairly easily. Whereas coming to university it’s a lot more work to get the good grades when you can sort of bubble along with a low 2:1 and sort of do alright fairly easily. So I suppose sort of back starting university I probably … would have hoped to - looking at a high 2:1 or a first but. I think I just sort of I dunno maybe it’s just resignation [laughter] face the facts or I don’t know…

He has thought about studying law but is fed up studying. ‘I don’t know what my degree’s useful for…what’s the point in continuing studying…obviously law would be something kind of obvious [laughter] like to go into but why continue studying if there’s no- if it doesn’t give me something useful at the end of it?’ He has not strategically thought about adding value to his HE credentials to gain advantage in the competitive labour market. He works to make ends meet and pay for his planned three months travelling overseas

…It's happened every year - sort of got to the point - where I just sort of need to work for the money…I don’t have the time to be picky about work or what I want to do.

As he approaches graduation he thinks about the value of getting some office work experience.

so when I say office work it’s just literally gonna be anything that’s based in an office … so I can say when I’m next looking for a job that I’ve got some experience of working in an office other than two week's work at school [laughter].
He has to return home as his parents want him to look after the garden while they are travelling. This is a useful excuse not to have to look elsewhere for accommodation and to delay actively looking for more permanent work. He also sees his joint degree as compounding his uncertainty about what he wants to do.

I don’t know whether it SHOULD be the university’s responsibility to make sure that graduates know what they want to do…I would say that more help would’ve been nice …and I feel maybe because I’m doing a joint degree that it’s sort of (.) overlooked in way I it might just be sort of a personal thing where I was sort of caught between …politics and the economics side of it a bit. So the economics department always has sort of finance recruitment fairs and things like that …which are sort of a bit daunting cos everyone’s sort of really keen to work hard and get on the graduate ladder and everything’

He does not set a priority on seeking opportunities to help him develop the skills and attributes he requires to secure a job. When he returns from travelling he starts applying for graduate jobs for which he feels he meets the criteria. During the selection process he discovers that his analysing skills are adequate but his group work and presentation skills let him down. He gets a job as a receptionist with some administrative duties through a temping agency. The permanent roles he applies for require a 2.1 which makes him feel that having a degree does not set ‘you apart in any way’. He does not think of himself as a graduate because he does not have a ‘decent job’ at the moment. However, he is not actively adding to his credentials to improve his employability and other than the reception work and gardening has gained very few insights into participating in the labour market in the way that Nadine and Liz have, for example.

7.1.6 Joe (an instrumentalist)

Joe had enrolled at university after his A levels but withdrew after the first term. Before re-enrolling at the age of 22 he had worked in casinos and as a judo coach, a job he continues to do as an undergraduate. He is also completing his gold Duke of Edinburgh award. When he begins applying for graduate jobs, he is either rejected or hears nothing back. He was ‘feeling a little bit nervous about it’ as all his colleagues seemed to have a job either as a result of internships or the graduate recruitment process. He decides then that the best course of action for him to take is to concentrate on his university work and put his efforts into attaining a first class degree classification. Just after his examinations he has an interview for a position in proprietary trading which he found out about through an email from his departmental careers advisor. He admits that
...it’s really difficult to find out about prop trading firms because they’re quite secretive, they don’t advertise, they don’t do milk rounds, they don’t do anything, because all the guys are self-employed.

He is very enthusiastic when offered a trading job and is aware that proprietary firms are not so closely regulated. However, he thinks it will be a 'good place to work because they're quite often a lot more relaxed and they don't have graduate schemes, they just take people when they come if they're suitable'. He accepts that he will be self employed, essentially unsalaried with 'no job security at all'. This is 'scaring' him and 'exciting' him at the same time.

It is high risk, high reward and it’s exactly what I want to do, so even if I work there for a year and don’t make money, at least I’ll have the experience to go away with and a very strong case to work for an investment bank on a salary.

As he comes to the end of his degree course he reflects that his time at university has given him the confidence to do presentations and the ability to promote the trading fund his department runs for new students. He describes this as 'a turning point'. He thinks this new found confidence will contribute to his participation in the labour market and ultimately managing his career. Joe supports himself, his girlfriend, a dog and a horse, and is very motivated to work and does so throughout his degree. As he nears the end of his course he is very aware that he wants a role that makes use of his degree in International Securities, Investment and Banking. The fact that he has travelled, worked in casinos and as a judo coach means that he has developed some of the elements of career motivation outlined by London (1998) and presented in Table 7.1 below. However, given the longitudinal nature of this project, we can see that his optimistic approach to his new role in proprietary trading is somewhat tarnished by the time he is interviewed in June 2009. He continues to develop career insight as he realises that taking risks and having high rewards do not necessarily go hand in hand. His experience leaves him more realistic about his abilities, about working for himself in the banking sector, the ethics of what he is doing and the dilemma of working as part of a team and being in competition with its members.

During the late summer of 2009 Joe and the trading company part company and he begins working for a recruitment company. He secures this position through his contacts. He realises that the high risk ‘game’ of trading is too unpredictable and losing money is not something he is comfortable with.
### Table 7.1 Three dimensions of career motivation (London, 1998)

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<tr>
<th>Career resilience</th>
<th>Career insight</th>
<th>Career identity</th>
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<tr>
<td>The ability to adapt to changing circumstances even when circumstances are disruptive or discouraging.</td>
<td>The ability to be realistic about one’s self and one’s career,</td>
<td>The extent to which one defines one’s self by work,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief in one’s self,</td>
<td>Establishing career goals,</td>
<td>It consists of job organisational and professional involvement, and the need for advancement recognition and a leadership role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The need for achievement,</td>
<td>Knowing one’s strengths and weaknesses in relation to career.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The need to evaluate events and circumstances,</td>
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<tr>
<td>A willingness to take risks,</td>
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<tr>
<td>The ability to work independently or co-operatively as needed.</td>
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### 7.1.7 Motivated to have a job or ‘career’

When considering the young people in this project, like Joe, the instrumentalists are more clearly ‘career ‘motivated and become more clearly defined by their work faster than the other groups. A year after graduation in their 2009 interview Aaron and Miles (both instrumentalists) are on a journey towards having a career identity where their work is fundamental to their sense of who they are. Hilary (another instrumentalist) completed her MSc and in the autumn of 2009 went on to secure a DFID position as a Health Economist in South America. In her diary entry in August 2009, she shows her career motivation, which links very clearly with her focus on managing her career and her employability. She devotes a section of her diary, essay style under the heading Career Actions, to all the activities she is involved in which contribute to her preparation for employment. A summary of Hilary’s strategic decision ‘to make the most of networking and career advice opportunities’ available to her in her postgraduate institution, are presented here by way of demonstrating her motivation to pursue her career.

1) I remained signed up to and joined new email lists with local volunteering opportunities in development and job lists personalised to my interests (both national and international).

2) I attended a careers fair with an international focus, although (much like at Reading), mainly focused around financial organisations that operate
internationally and a small amount of volunteering abroad (mainly teaching and building) projects, neither was particularly useful.

3) I attended talks by the UK Civil Service recruiters, the UNDP chief recruiter and a representative from DIFD. These were quite useful.

4) I applied for the Government Economic Service fast stream as a route into the UK civil service for graduate economists without much work experience. It is a possible route into DIFD. I got an invitation to the Economics Assessment Centre day. This involved writing a technical and non-technical report on pensions, answering broad economics questions, giving a presentation and an hour long interview with an academic and a professional economist. Unfortunately I did not get any further than this stage.

5) I heard about an Overseas Development Institute (ODI) fellowship scheme putting postgraduate economists into the civil services of developing countries and we [those interested] were invited to some informal talks by previous fellows to fully understand the scheme and the nature of the work.

6) I (along with about 80% of the course) applied to the ODI fellowship scheme and was invited for an interview. This consisted of a group activity (discussing a scenario of corruption between a fellow and donor agencies) and a panel interview (with six members of staff)...I was given a conditional offer...on me passing my course and them finding a suitable placement and having sufficient funding. The program is independent but part funded by DIFD and reliant on regular funds.

Neil (a hesitator) is in contrast to Hilary as he is relatively unconcerned about graduate employment of managing his career of his employability. Neil admits he is ‘quite lethargic’ and leaves ‘things alone quite a lot’ and that he kind of ‘drifted into stuff.’ He is not actively engaging in looking for work, ‘getting a job isn’t that great’. He admits that he is ‘prompted’ to apply for his Masters because there ‘was a lack of anything else to do really. It wasn’t really a positive thing’. He sees neither his postgraduate nor his undergraduate degree as being useful for him in the future ‘in any kind of a career way.’

Of course, many people go on to pursue careers and work for which a degree or their specific degree is not required. Young people will manage and pursue their futures in different ways and with different levels of satisfaction about how successful they are. The narratives outlined here illustrate how young graduates approach their pursuit of career and their employability in different ways.
7.2 Postgraduate Transition

Of those young people who participated in the graduate study, four went on to Masters Degree courses, Billy, History; Emily, History; Hilary, Economics; and Neil, History. Of those three remained at Reading, two as full time self-funded postgraduates (Billy, Neil) and one as a part time self funded student (Emily). Hilary went on to postgraduate study at a Russell Group university. Interviews with all four young people a year after completing their undergraduate degree during the summer term of their Masters studies revealed some interesting findings. As the four young people embarked on their studies they have differing expectations and levels of excitement.

Billy (a learner) enjoys doing his undergraduate thesis and won a departmental prize for his efforts. This inspires him to consider further studies with the then unvoiced but later confirmed thought of pursuing an academic career. He is quietly proud of his first class degree classification.

Emily (a hesitator) is interested in a career in politics or doing something that would use her history degree. She decides to opt for a Masters degree in history. She decides against politics as she feels it is difficult to break into.

I suppose part of it’s a bit of laziness, because I just can’t be bothered to be that competitive.

She decides to do her degree part time. She is aiming for and achieved a 2.1 degree classification.

Hilary realises during her undergraduate studies that to be an agent of change in developmental economics, you have to do so ‘from the inside’. She targets a Russell Group university because of its worldwide reputation which could open doors to her in the future.

...job opportunities (the knowledge that having [name of the university] on my CV would give me more attention) and networking opportunities (the alumni system is particularly good).
Hilary was aiming for and achieved a first class degree classification to get a place on the course she wanted.

Neil really enjoyed doing his undergraduate dissertation and

I guess a Masters is kind of like the same kind of thing.

He is postponing thinking about the future and he thinks about becoming a postgraduate

I guess what prompted it was lack of anything else to do really. It wasn’t really a positive thing; it was rather a negative thing. I think it got to a stage where just hanging around and getting a job for another whole year didn’t seem to be like that worthwhile really but I might have to do that obviously if I don’t get into my Masters which is a bit of a worry at the moment.

He achieves a 2.1 and accepts that in his usual understated manner. His motivation is also tied in with getting work in a museum in some form of educational capacity.

Neil chooses his Masters because he enjoyed university, enjoyed education and just wanted to carry on. It also means he postpones making any career decisions and has very little interest in developing his employability.

Emily realises that to work in the museum or heritage sector a Masters degree is necessary but as a self-funded student, she feels she cannot complete her degree fulltime. She hopes to combine paid employment with voluntary work which will be useful for her applications to the museum of heritage labour market sector.

7.3 Young people moving on

The findings of this study suggest that young people in higher education have different motivations for being here. They approach their studies and their careers in different ways
and manage their employability in a way that suits the situation they find themselves in. The instrumentalists develop a narrative of employability and are like a “moving target” (Vondracek, 1990, p.38). They are also motivated in many other aspects of their life which increases their chances of success in the graduate labour market (e.g. volunteering, community or religious activities, campaigning, committee membership). They apply for paid and unpaid opportunities, network effectively and are active in their pursuit of opportunities which enhance their employability. One of the benefits of a longitudinal study such as this is the realisation that for some of the instrumentalists there are elements of doubt when they realise their ambition and secure that graduate position. They wonder if they accepted the first opportunity that came along and whether they should have held out for something better. Johnny and Phoebe regret their decisions and feel somehow that they have ‘narrowed their choices’ by applying for specific graduate roles. Johnny remains in post but Phoebe decides to move onto other experiences as she tries to decide what to do longer term. The non-instrumental graduates had more varied experiences. Billy, one of two students oriented to learning, moved on to his PhD studies and harbours hopes of an academic career. Bob, moves from being a learner to being a hesitator and finds it difficult to know what he wants to apply for as he does not really know what he wants to do. The hesitators are moving on in their own way and in their own time. They are gaining experience through travel, temporary work, and exploring the labour market but not necessarily the graduate one. Monica’s narrative of employability has been more about her values and working her way up rather that worrying about being a graduate and being limited to applying for graduate roles. The two students who are oriented towards introspection have moved on and are developing their independence but are not pursuing graduate opportunities. Alice is still hoping to break into journalism, while Kate is taking the time to find herself after a difficult transition through university. The fact that early career ideas and what young people actually go onto do after graduation (see Tables 6.3-6.9 and Appendix 3) differ considerably implies that more guidance and exploration of the labour market is required before encouraging young people to engage in an institutional employability agenda.

7.4 Research questions revisited

Answers to the three research questions are summarised below.

Research question 1

How do graduates manage their career in the first year after graduation?

The findings show that graduates manage their careers and their employability in different ways. The instrumental students became instrumental graduates with a clear focus on their

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2 For an example of a hesitator’s life-career journey (James) see Appendix 4.
futures and their careers. They predominantly applied for graduate roles and developed an understanding of how the graduate recruitment process works. They described clearly how they develop and change over the course of their first year in employment. They adjusted to their new working environment and learnt how to be ‘professional’ and developed a ‘professional persona’. How they prepare for their job interviews and their work is important. They spoke about how they dress for work became a key element in the management of their careers (Suits, corporate working clothes, briefcases, smart shoes, cuff links). Of those who were successful in securing graduate positions prior to graduation, two began to wonder if they had accepted the first offer that came along and wonder if there may have been a ‘better’ opportunity out there. Those in regional offices wonder whether they would have been successful in London.

The students oriented to hesitation manage their careers and employment differently and were less inclined to apply for graduate roles. They explained this in terms of being unsure about what they want to do. This not knowing resulted in applications for a range of roles most not requiring a degree. They wanted to gain experience, earn money and many wanted to take some time out to travel. The recession was used as an excuse for not applying for graduate roles or not being shortlisted for jobs whether graduate level or not. They were flexible and adaptable in their approach and having a ‘work’ identity was less important to them. For most having a graduate role a year after graduation would have been nice but it was not their main focus. They had begun to understand that the type of graduate roles advertised were not necessarily the type of roles they would necessarily find satisfying. Two of the hesitators who did apply for graduate roles were told in feedback from prospective employers that they were not convincing in interviews. They did not demonstrate enough enthusiasm for the role or the company they had applied for.

The two graduates oriented towards introspection took their time to adjust to life after graduation. They did not apply for any graduate roles and were less focussed on understanding how the graduate labour market works. Neither had particularly enjoyed their university experience and regarded the year after graduation as an opportunity to develop a sense of adult identity and earn some money to become financially independent. It was not exclusively about gaining graduate employment.

Of the two students identified as learners in the original thesis one remained in higher education demonstrating his academic potential by securing funding for an MA and a PhD. The other learner became disillusioned with his higher education experience and how it had prepared him for the labour market. He managed his career by applying for various roles but failed to convince graduate employers that he had the skills and attributes they
required. However, he was successful securing non-graduate work, took time out to go travelling and was back into the recruitment process in his second year after graduation.

Research question 2

How do graduates reflect on their university experience?

Overall the participants reflected very positively on their university experience. They had developed personally and socially and had become more confident and independent. On the eve of graduation they were happy to move onto adulthood and were optimistic about their employment prospects. They were full of hope about the possibilities ahead of them. However, their reflections on their university experience changed based on how long it took them to gain employment. Those who had secured graduate positions prior to graduation were more positive about the benefits of their higher education credentials. The longer it took to gain employment the graduates considered ‘meaningful’ the more disillusioned and cynical they became about the benefits of investing in higher education and having a degree. They felt their experience had not given them an advantage in the labour market. Those who had completed economics modules were overall more positive about the usefulness of their degree to their future lives than those who had studied history.

Research question 3

Are the four types of orientation identified in undergraduates (O’Regan, 2009) sustained post graduation?

The responses to research questions 1 and 2 bear testament to the stability of the four orientations to future and careers identified in the doctoral thesis. Those oriented towards instrumentalism realised their goals and are well represented in graduate roles and permanent employment. Only one instrumental student and one of the two learners began to demonstrate procrastinating behaviour signified by the hesitators. The hesitators, in some cases in the first year after graduation were ‘drifting’ but coming into the second year after graduation were beginning to build a portfolio of experience and skills which they saw as helping them decide what kind of work they would find meaningful.
8. Conclusion

A longitudinal qualitative project such as this gives us an insight into what it is like for young people during their transition to adulthood, their search for independence and their trajectory into and out of higher education. However, the narrative nature of this approach to research into individual lives means that we cannot generalise from the findings. That is not to say that we cannot draw conclusions from them.

If we take leaving university as a key transition point where individuals once again have to chip their own niche within a new social landscape, we need to prepare our graduates for the transition to employment. Universities have employability strategies to tackle skills deficits and to ensure better links between universities, employers and business. This study reveals that young people approach their careers and the labour market in different ways. In order for our graduates to compete in a competitive labour market, we need to provide opportunities for young graduates to develop the skills employers say they are lacking, such as creativity, teamwork and entrepreneurial behaviour. The findings reported here suggest that the motivation to study, to develop academic and employment-related skills will vary across individuals and schools. The study also shows that as graduates, they manage their lives, their careers and their approach to life post graduation in very different ways. What students bring with them into higher education will also vary. In this study we have data that establishes the drive to ‘get involved’ in various activities and schemes prior to completing their degree can be for intrinsic value or can be more strategically located within a drive to succeed in the graduate labour market. There is a link between how young people acknowledge the value of additional ‘relevant’ experience and how that translates to their attitude towards and their success in the graduate labour market.

Once again we can ask the question ‘what are universities for?’ Higher education is about learning, critical thinking, developing as a person and preparing to make a contribution to society and the economy. However, young people develop at different rates, prioritise different elements of becoming an adult and develop a sense of what being a graduate means depending on how their understanding of the relationship between human action and social structures develops. Universities currently value instrumental students as they are most likely to succeed in the graduate labour market. Employability and career education or career management skills can be placed within the curriculum as desirable skills for life rather than simply to gain an advantage in the graduate labour market. This study can also act as a warning about the ‘perceived’ success of gaining a place on a graduate training scheme. For at least three of the graduates this success was lived out through the perceptions of others and when placed in the graduate role they become disillusioned with the ‘certainty’ and ‘reality’ of that role quite quickly. It was not what they wanted or what
they were led to believe it would be. Graduates who travel, work temporarily or part time, gain experience and skills, remain open to possibilities and many have clearer ideas of where they are going and what they want out of life as result of these (see Appendix 4). Other more instrumental people may refer to these as ‘trial and error’ experiences and not necessarily relevant to securing a graduate role and meeting university destination targets.

It is important to realise that identity development evolves as a result of our experiences and that the university plays a role in how successfully young people passing through the system will cope when they leave. Therefore, graduate success is not only measured in graduate destinations but in how well prepared graduates are to survive in the world beyond the institution as well as in a competitive labour market. Given the current climate, employability skills are an aspect of this development and we must consider how best to implement an employability strategy that has something to offer all students not just the instrumental ones. We can learn much from London’s (1998) theory of career motivation which stresses resilience and insight and also from Fugate, Kinichi and Ashforth’s (2004) dimensions of employability which focus on motivation also but include adaptability and human and social capital. Careers, after all, are understood in retrospect. The challenge for us is to equip our graduates with the necessary skills and instil within them a confidence in their ability which will facilitate and smooth their transition into employment. These can be achieved through a higher education experience which combines academic skills with work-related experiences and skills regardless of degree course or school. If we have an employability strategy we need to think carefully about how to implement it for the whole student body and not just those ‘career driven’ instrumental students.

8.1. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. University policy makers recognise that students are orientated towards their future employment in different ways.
2. The university does not primarily target instrumental students who are already engaged with the process of gaining graduate employment.
3. Reframe skills for employment as skills for life to include personal development as well as employment.
4. Consider integrating work-related interventions, such as skills development, labour market information, work experience, recruitment procedure knowledge into the curriculum across all degree programmes.
8.2. Dissemination

In addition to this report, the following dissemination activities were carried out:

8.2.1. Publications


8.2.2. Conference presentations


References


IDENTITY & EMPLOYABILITY PROJECT
Phase 4: Summer 2009
Final Interview Protocol

INTRODUCTION

Checklist: confidentiality, permission to record, acknowledge receipt of Dec 2008 & May 2009 diaries.

I’m interested to know how you’ve been getting on since we met last year. So over to you – how have things been since our last interview? What are your thoughts about your current situation? I’m interested, as you know, in your reflections on the past, particularly your university experiences, your life currently and your plans for and thoughts about the future. Where would you like to start?

TOPICS TO COVER

1. Current situation – e.g. employment and or study, location, type of accommodation, financial situation. If appropriate: relationships, their health, caring responsibilities… How content are you with your life now? Refer back to their feelings about the future in 2008.

2. Work-related experience – Checklist: in the past year full time employment, graduate scheme, temporary work (number of different roles and length of time in each role), part time work, opportunities for educational/training courses.

3. Reflections on 2008-2009 since graduation – prompts below:

What have you learnt about yourself in the last year?
How have you changed in the last year? (developing personally, gaining in confidence, feeling positive or not)
Depending on answer to ‘How content are you with your life now?’… You said that you were…..has this feeling been constant over the last year? Talk me through the changes. How have you adjusted to life as a graduate? (coping with work or study, lack of work, making friends, new living arrangements, maintaining contact with friends, family)
What new roles and responsibilities have you taken on? How are you coping with life as it is now?
Have you learnt anything about yourself that you hadn’t expected? Tell me more about it.
What have been the highlights of the last year? Any low points or frustrations?
Has the year turned out as you expected? (Check what they said in 2008 Interview).
How is it different? Have you gained any new skills? knowledge? experience? (through work or training opportunities).
If you could do it all again, what would you do differently?
4. Reflections on university
What are your thoughts about your university experience one year on? Has the past year changed your perceptions of your university experience in any way? Has your academic experience had any impact on what you have been doing since graduation? How much contact have you had with friends, colleagues from university since your graduation? When you think back on personal tutorials, career management skills, and other university-related activities, what part did they play in helping you make choices and plan for the future?

5. Help and support with planning and making choices
Informal support: from others including friends, family, colleagues
Formal support: careers professionals – university careers service, other careers practitioners, group sessions
Using the internet

6. The future
What are your hopes and intentions for the future? Where do you see yourself a year from now? Feelings about the future (excited, anxious, optimistic, energised), short term and long term plans.
Thoughts about their ‘career’. Are you on track for realising your career aspirations?
What are your thoughts about your ‘career’ now? (Similar to last year or have they changed)
What’s important to you? Are you planning to do any further training?

7. Participation in the project
Do you think participating in this project has had an impact on you?

8. Any additional information not covered so far
Is there anything you would like to add that hasn’t been covered already?

CONCLUSION
Express gratitude for their contribution to both projects. Ask whether they are happy to be contacted again in the future. Sign form giving permission and contact details.
Ask about using audio and text on CCMS and other websites. Sign form giving permission and contact details.
APPENDIX 2

What to write in your diary

Thank you for agreeing to help with my research project.
Here are some guidelines to help you complete your diary.

Please fill in the day and date of each diary entry.
There is no upper limit on how much or how often you write. However, you are expected to submit the equivalent of approximately 200 words per month.
You will submit the first group of diary entries in December 2008 (minimum 1000 words) and the second group of entries in May 2009 (minimum 800 words).

Your diary entries offer you a chance to record any careers related activity you are involved in. This could include a job, voluntary work, work experience, travel, an educational course (eg. masters or training course) or any experiences of seeking work.
You should also comment on the things that have influenced your career decisions, for example

- your family, friends, the media or your community
- your experiences in education (e.g. looking back at your time at university, or any new educational experiences)
- your experiences since university (in work, travelling, meeting new people)

Questions you should consider include:
- How do your beliefs, values and interests influence your career planning?
- Have your experiences matched your expectations?

I will write back when I receive your written reflections and may ask for further information. You have the right to reply or not as you prefer.
If you would prefer to correspond with me on paper rather than by email, let me know so that we can make the necessary arrangements.

All your diary entries will be treated confidentially by the researcher. For further details about this, do look back at the information and consent forms that you signed when you accepted to participate in the project.
### APPENDIX 3

**Undergraduate career ideas 2006 and what they are doing in 2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Degree &amp; Orientation</th>
<th>Career ideas 2006</th>
<th>Situation 2009-2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td>BA Economics <em>Instrumentalist</em></td>
<td>Civil service economic forecaster, Journalist</td>
<td>Graduate role Analyst (planning)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>BA History and Politics <em>Introspective</em></td>
<td>Civil service administrator, journalist</td>
<td>Temporary role County Court (fines)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>BSc Economics <em>Instrumentalist</em></td>
<td>Financial services advisor, Investment banker</td>
<td>Graduate role Market researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billy</td>
<td>BA History <em>Learner</em></td>
<td>No career ideas expressed</td>
<td>Doctoral candidate (full time, funded)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>BA Politics and Economics <em>Learner</em></td>
<td>Accountant, Financial services advisor, Fundraiser, Journalist, Trader</td>
<td>Temporary job in Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>BA History <em>Hesitator</em></td>
<td>Editor, Journalist, Secondary school teacher</td>
<td>Applying for PGCE, working in major high street retail store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doris</td>
<td>BA History and English <em>Hesitator</em></td>
<td>Barrister, Event organiser, Lecturer, Secondary school teacher</td>
<td>University administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>BA History and International Relations <em>Hesitator</em></td>
<td>Politician, Researcher</td>
<td>Second year of part-time masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Senior sales assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Weekend retail supervisor at museum, London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>BA Economics <em>Hesitator</em></td>
<td>No career ideas expressed</td>
<td>Business Development and Marketing (engineering firm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilary</td>
<td>BSc Economics <em>Instrumentalist</em></td>
<td>Accountant, Environmental consultant, Fundraiser</td>
<td>Health Economist in South America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>BA History <em>Hesitator</em></td>
<td>Engineer, Journalist</td>
<td>Paramedic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>BSc International Securities, Investment and Banking <em>Instrumentalist</em></td>
<td>Accountant, Trader</td>
<td>Recruitment consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnny</td>
<td>BSc Geography and Economics (Regional Science) <em>Instrumentalist</em></td>
<td>Accountant, Financial services advisor, Trader</td>
<td>Graduate role (accountancy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>BA History and English <em>Introspective</em></td>
<td>Civil service administrator, Lecturer</td>
<td>Library Assistant (full time)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Undergraduate career ideas 2006 and what they are doing in 2010.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Degree &amp; Orientation</th>
<th>Career ideas 2006</th>
<th>Situation 2009-2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liz</td>
<td>BA History Instrumentalist</td>
<td>M15, Political researcher, Primary school teacher, Secondary school teacher</td>
<td>Competing PGCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miles</td>
<td>BSc International Securities, Investment and Banking Instrumentalist</td>
<td>Accountant, Financial services advisor, Fund manager, Investment banker, Trader</td>
<td>Analyst in the City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monica</td>
<td>BA Economics Hesitator</td>
<td>Accountant, Market researcher, Retail buyer, Town planner, Trader</td>
<td>Ambulance service (call centre)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadine</td>
<td>BA History Instrumentalist</td>
<td>Solicitor</td>
<td>Administrator with Sports Relief Charity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neil</td>
<td>BA History and Politics Hesitator</td>
<td>Civil service administrator, Lecturer, Researcher</td>
<td>Completed his Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoebe</td>
<td>BA Economics Instrumentalist</td>
<td>Accountant, Financial services advisor,</td>
<td>Accepted onto PGCE course (secondary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>BA Economics Instrumentalist</td>
<td>Accountant, Financial services advisor, Fund manager, Investment banker, Trader</td>
<td>Executive personal assistant finance firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>BA History and Politics Instrumentalist</td>
<td>Secondary school teacher</td>
<td>Secondary School Teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 4

James

Is studying history. Only ‘slackers’ at his school didn’t go to university. ‘It was presumed that I would’... ‘it was drilled into us’. Settles into university life very easily. Had wanted to travel for a year before university but felt from the family’s point of view, it was not a good time to go away.

Works in local government office during summer vacation which was ‘a bit boring’

Does not ‘really want to do the graduate scheme... I’d prefer to start from a lower level and go up through the ranks... start from scratch’

Would like to do ‘practical things – anything hands on really wouldn’t be too bad’. But ‘if there was a job leading from doing a history degree... I’d enjoy doing that. But I’m just not sure what sort of job titles there are’

Graduates with a 2.1 and moves back home. Goes travelling for three months and it ‘was the best thing I had ever done ever’. Comes back to a recession. He looks at the graduate jobs. ‘I either didn’t particularly want to do or wasn’t driven hard enough to do... I went for some interviews and the one thing they said to me at the end of it was, I lacked the drive to get these jobs’. He agrees and starts working in the local pub.

Does emergency training with the ambulance service to become ‘First Response’ trained and begins to consider becoming a paramedic. Thinks it will ‘be ideal. It will ’be intense working in London as a paramedic. So I spent ages writing a personal statement...’

Is accepted onto the paramedic training scheme and is ‘happy I want to do a job where I can make a difference and like help others. I think this time last year, I probably wouldn’t have cared that much... And so I am happy that has changed. It really was travelling that made that difference’

Engineer, Journalist

RAF

Civil service

I haven’t really got anything in mind at the moment. No. I haven’t decided anything yet.

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September 2009