

## **Developing understanding and articulating the impact of SHAPE graduates in their communities: nuancing Graduate Outcomes and civic impact.**

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### **Research Domains**

Employability, enterprise and graduate careers (EE)

### **Abstract**

This paper presents the methodological design of a research project which aims to develop understanding and articulating the impact of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts for People and the Economy (SHAPE) graduates in their communities. Through gathering reflections from graduates, we aim to enrich and develop language used to talk about the contribution of graduates to workplaces and wider society.

The project, based in an English HEI context, includes a digital story telling platform designed to facilitate data generation, distributed through social media to connect with graduates from undergraduate academic programmes. This paper presents our innovative methodological approach along with generation and visualization of digital stories from the data analysis.

This interdisciplinary project includes researchers from learning development, career services, digital learning services and SHAPE academic programmes to develop a 'toolkit' which will allow SHAPE graduates to articulate the impact of their contributions to their professional lives and communities.

### **Full paper**

The main way of measuring the 'success' of graduates in the UK, is through the annual Graduate Outcomes survey (Office for Students, 2023), which is now sent 15months after graduation, to all those graduating from undergraduate courses. 'Success' as a graduate in this survey is indicated to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) by graduates achieving a 'positive' destination, identified through a series of employment indicators informed by the Standard Industrial Classification of economic activities (SIC) (HESA, no date). This classification system does not fit well with SHAPE disciplines (Hedges et al, 2022) but continues to inform the way that undergraduates are taught to frame their activity beyond academia.

The collection of Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy (SHAPE) is a recent coining of the 'collective name for the social sciences, humanities and the arts... SHAPE research and skills are particularly valuable to the 21st-century workplace – they are vital to the health, wellbeing and prosperity of the nation and to tackling grand challenges' (The British Academy, no date). The challenges of framing and articulating the impact of graduates on their working and community contexts

resonates with those of researchers working to articulate the impact of SHAPE discipline research in terms of the 'effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia' (UKRI, 2022). With the use of digital storytelling, we allow graduates to share their voices and experiences around life after Higher Education (HE). The digital sharings have been grouped into three themes: contributions to the community, contributions to the graduate's workplace, and the contributions to the graduate's personal life. We provided a digital space to present these anonymous contributions and intend to use this to inform the 'toolkit' which will then provide graduates, through means of career services, the opportunity to use what is gathered in a positive way towards prospects and future career guidance.

Digital storytelling is described by Ward et al. as 'a constructivist method of assessment to help students situate the theoretical and conceptual content in what we might call their own philosophy of education' (2023:40). The success of a graduate tends to be measured on 'the most employable graduates' (QS, 2022), through digital storytelling we give graduates back the space to discuss their own indicators of success and the diverse ways these trails of success trickle back into the community. Behle (2016) presented the figures of graduates working in what are considered non-graduate jobs, which were previously relatively unexplored. This data can help to inform the relevance and need for research projects to explore further the elaborate explanations and reasoning behind this from the perspective of the graduates themselves.

This project is the first step towards developing a 'tool kit' for SHAPE graduates to use to assess and articulate the impact of their contributions to their professional lives and communities. The use of the tool kit by graduates and also academics and employability teams in HEIs working with undergraduates in SHAPE disciplines, has potential for an impact case study, tracking the effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, public policy or services and quality of life, beyond academia.

## References

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