SHAPE Skills at Work

Case studies from graduates of the social sciences, humanities and arts

The British Academy

November 2022

Contents

Acknowledgements

We are extremely grateful for the input of the Steering Group which oversaw this project. The list below reflects their position at the time of advising this work.

Professor Sir Ian Diamond FBA, FAcSS, FRSE	National Statistician (Chair)
Dr Frances Burstow	Deputy Director for Skills and Strategy, Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)
Simon Gallacher	Former Head of Quantitative Skills and Student Programmes, Nuffield Foundation
Cheryl Lloyd	Programme Head, Education, The Nuffield Foundation
Dr Rita Gardner	Chief Executive Officer, Academy of Social Sciences
Professor Roger Goodman FAcSS	President, Academy of Social Sciences 2020-2021; Nissan Professor of Modern Japanese Stud-ies, University of Oxford
Shelagh Green	Director of Career Service, University of Edinburgh; former President, Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services
Professor Martin Halliwell	Co-Chair, Arts and Humanities Alliance; Head of the School of Arts, Professor of American Studies, University of Leicester
David Hughes	Chief Executive, Association of Colleges
Professor Emma Hunt	Vice Chancellor and Chief Executive, Falmouth University
Stephen Isherwood	Chief Executive, the Institute of Student Employers
Professor Ewart Keep	Director of Centre for Skills Knowledge & Organisational Performance, University of Oxford
Professor Neil Kenny FBA	Professor of French, University of Oxford; Senior Research Fellow, All Souls College, British Academy Lead Fellow for Languages
Professor Peter Mandler FBA	Professor of Modern Cultural History, University of Cambridge
Kelly Smith	Senior Policy Adviser (Education), Royal Society
Anne Sofield	Associate Director of Programmes, Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)
Dr Catherine Souch	Head of Research and Higher Education, Royal Geographical Society
Dr Allan Sudlow	Director of Partnerships and Engagement, Arts and Humanities Research Council

British Academy staff

Dr Eleanor Hopkins	Senior Policy Adviser (HE & Skills), Lead Author
Tom Lyscom	Former Senior Policy Adviser (HE & Skills)
Sarah Cowan	Head of HE & Skills Policy

Summary

This report contains a collection of case studies that illustrate the ways in which SHAPE disciplines (Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts for People and the Economy) are essential to understand and prepare for a rapidly changing world. SHAPE disciplines develop the tools and expertise to examine, explain and change human behaviour and society, learn from the past and apply those lessons to the present.

SHAPE Skills at Work is the third in the British Academy's Skills Programme. Our first report, *The Right Skills* (2017), showed that pursuing SHAPE disciplines delivers core skills essential for future work and wider life, while *Qualified for the Future* (2020) quantitatively demonstrated the demand for these skills across the UK economy.[1] This report, *SHAPE Skills at Work*, presents 12 case studies that showcase and bring to life the ways in which SHAPE skills are utilised across the UK economy. The report builds on previous research in *The Right Skills* and *Qualified for the Future* by exploring how roles in the UK workforce depend on the skills acquired through SHAPE education and showcasing the careers and successes of a range of SHAPE graduates.

> *"Broad discussion is needed to ensure we harness the benefits of new technologies while mitigating potential downsides, and understanding the ethical and policy implications requires going beyond the implementation challenges. Or, just because it's possible to build something, should we? This is the wheelhouse of SHAPE".*
>
> Product Lead, Android Machine Learning — Google

Of course, 12 case studies is a limited sample and cannot be representative of all disciplines, industries, roles, or individual characteristics. Rather, the examples aim to complement our previous reports by examining in-depth how SHAPE skills are used and valued. They reveal an inspiring variety of industries and roles supported by SHAPE disciplines, as well as an eclectic mix of people who reflect the diverse strengths of SHAPE graduates.

The case studies in this report demonstrate how the core skills outlined in *The Right Skills* are present and evident in the working lives of SHAPE graduates. Participants identified core skills across **attitudes and behaviours**, **communication and collaboration** and **research and analysis**. They recognise these skills in their abilities and approaches to day-to-day working and demonstrate how the skills gained in SHAPE study are valuable and relevant across a range industries.

This report is relevant to policymakers who want to better understand and articulate the skills developed and harnessed by SHAPE graduates, and their value to society, the economy, and the environment. The rich collection of insights from our case study participants can also be utilised by school students, parents and teachers facing decisions about higher education study, as well as by SHAPE students in higher education thinking about their next steps.

We hope that the examples of success, value and enjoyment will offer their diverse voices to the evidence collected in our previous reports and add nuance to the ongoing question of the value of higher education.

1 The British Academy (2017), *The Right Skills: Celebrating skills in the arts, humanities and social sciences* and The British Academy. (2020), *Qualified for the Future: Quantifying demand for arts, humanities and social science skills.*

SHAPE graduates are:

1

Employed across the UK economy. The small sample of 12 cases included in this report offer insights into over half of sectors in the UK Standard Industrial Classification hierarchy, illustrating the breadth of skills developed by SHAPE graduates.[2]

*"I see real, **vocational** value in a rounded education, as we need both STEM and other subjects to thrive. The biggest challenges facing society, face society as a whole."*

Product Lead, Android Machine Learning, **Google**

2

Utilising highly valued skills in a variety of sectors, with our case study participants demonstrating skills in communication and collaboration, attitudes and behaviour, and research and analysis.

*"My role as a researcher [....] involves a lot of qualitative research: literature reviews, meta-analysis, and interviews, among others. But we also have to **understand the numbers** behind the stories, and the trends involved in the issues."*

Business Manager and Event Manager, **Anotherway Now**

3

Motivated by the breadth of perspectives and career flexibility that SHAPE disciplines offer.

*"I didn't know what I wanted to do career-wise and I didn't want to narrow down my options. I knew I wanted to do something that I felt was important and **made a difference,** rather than something that would pay the bills."*

Senior Data Journalist, **The Sunday Times**

4

More likely to have developed creative and social skills during their degree, in comparison to students who have studied STEM subjects.[3]

*"The degree told me that creativity goes hand-in-hand with structure and systems; **telling a story** requires themes, patterns, and a main narrative, but also affective and purposeful digressions."*

Neurodiversity Consultant and Trainer

2 Based on the 21 sectors outlined in the Standard Industrial Classification Hierarchy by the Office for National Statistics.

3 Rowan, A., Neves J. (2021), *2021 UK Engagement Survey*, AdvanceHE, pp. 20-21.

5

Contributing to innovation across our economy — over half of the UK's leading start-ups were founded by SHAPE graduates and 59% of the leaders of FTSE 100 companies have backgrounds in SHAPE disciplines, ranging from business and management to languages and history.[4,5]

*"Business and finance activities are centred around **human behaviour**, and you must be able to manage the politics and emotions of situations, act as an independent broker, and be sensitive to different parties but able to deliver hard truths."*

Vice Chairman and Managing Partner, Mergers, Acquisitions and Technology, **Deloitte**

6

Recognised as employable by a wide range of businesses.

A global survey of 1000 business leaders found that companies with successful talent recruitment were more likely to hire graduates with non-STEM degrees. Business leaders also identified their most in-demand skills as problem solving, creativity and teamwork.[6]

*"What drew me to film editing and storytelling was the **blend of creative, technical, digital and project management skills** required in this domain. The mix of these skills align well with my interests. I studied a **social science** since I like the analytical nature of mathematics, but I also enjoy a focus on people, art and culture."*

Video and Film Editor, **Spacestation**

7

Leaders in the civil service. Just over 80% of successful candidates in the civil service Fast Stream and Fast Track programmes have degrees in SHAPE and other non-science disciplines.[7]

*"My history studies helped me learn to get to the point and **communicate accessibly** in a great range of outputs, including large reports, articles, and exhibitions for the public."*

Community Engagement Officer, **Greater London Authority**

8

Passionate about their disciplines, ambitious to make positive differences, and intellectually curious about different societies and perspectives.[8]

*"As a result of my studies and the projects I've worked on, I have had the opportunity to take language courses, learn new skills, travel to and live in **remarkable places,** and engage in experiences that I would not have otherwise known about."*

Content Designer, **Event Communications**

4 Data on the educational background of all current 100 FTSE CEOS gathered through LinkedIn profiles. Analysis undertaken by Tom Hunter, LSE for the British Academy. Initial data gathered April 2021. Updated by the British Academy August 2022.

5 Data on the educational background of 204 UK start-up founders based on data gathered from startups.co.uk and LinkedIn profiles. Analysis undertaken by Tom Hunter, LSE for the British Academy. Data gathered April 2021.

6 Kavanaugh, J., Kumar, R. (2019), 'How to Develop a Talent Pipeline for your Digital Transformation', *Harvard Business Review*, [5 Aug 22].

7 Civil Service HR (2018), *Civil Service Fast Stream: Annual Report 2017 and 2018*, p. 46.

8 ComRes interviewed 2,280 people online between 20 August and 2 September 2019: 767 undergraduate students and 1,513 people who graduated in the last 5-10 years. UUK and Comres (Sept 2019), *Universities UK – Students and Recent Graduates Research – September 2019*, pp. 1-9.

SHAPE Skills at Work

Methodology

In this report, we have collected and presented 12 case studies from graduates working in a myriad of roles and sectors to showcase SHAPE skills at work. Though this sample cannot be representative of all SHAPE skills, disciplines and careers, we collected an inspiring diversity of examples that demonstrate the great range of options available to people with a degree in SHAPE.

Relevant individuals were identified from a mixture of British Academy Fellow and staff contacts, through Learned Societies and Subject Associations, and by searching online professional networks. The interviews took place in 2021 and involved a semi-structured approach to achieve a balance of probing the specific core SHAPE skills and allowing the chance for new avenues to be explored.

The participants identified the full range of core SHAPE skills as demonstrated in *The Right Skills* (see Figure 1), as well as additional skills that they felt were essential to their role and valuable to their lives. We have aimed to achieve coverage across SHAPE disciplines, industry sectors, levels of seniority, employment types, and equality and diversity characteristics. Together, the 12 case studies in this report offer an insight into over half of the sectors in the UK Standard Industrial Classification hierarchy, including the research-intensive sectors of information and communication; financial and insurance activities; and professional, scientific and technical activities.[9] This is illustrative of SHAPE graduates' breadth of skills and employability across the UK economy.

SHAPE skills cluster in three core areas, with case study participants identifying additional skills

As supported by the evidence presented in *Qualified for the Future*, the SHAPE graduates interviewed as part of this report are employed across a wide range of sectors — ranging from financial services and education to media and technology — because they have the skills that employers need.[10] The skills and expertise developed by SHAPE graduates are essential to the future of the UK, offering considerable economic, cultural, and social value.[11]

Research presented in *The Right Skills* identified a core set of skills shared by undergraduate students, and postgraduate and early career researchers across the social sciences, humanities and arts.[12] Proficiency in these areas develops as an individual becomes more advanced in their study.[13] These SHAPE skills can be divided into three core areas: **communication and collaboration**; **research and analysis**; and **attitudes and behaviours**, as shown in Figure 1.

9 Based on the 21 sectors outlined in the UK Standard Industrial Classification Hierarchy by Office for National Statistics.

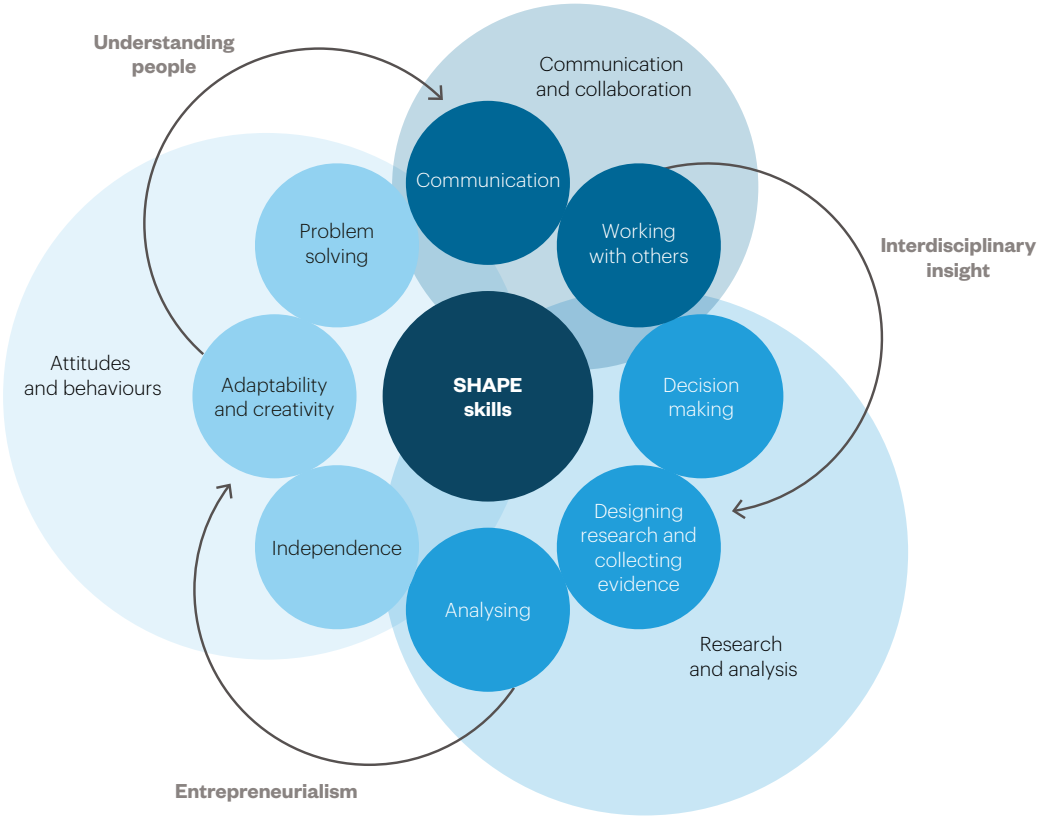
10 The British Academy, *Qualified for the Future*, p. 10.

11 Ibid, pp. 22-23.

12 The British Academy, *The Right Skills*, p. 9. The research involved analysing a range of sources including Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Subject Benchmark Statements, and the Economic and Social Research Council and Arts and Humanities Research Council training frameworks, which describe the skills individuals studying SHAPE should develop.

13 Ibid, p. 21.

Figure 1: Core SHAPE skills as identified in *The Right Skills* (2017) and by case study participants



Alongside these core skills, our case study participants also articulated additional skills and aptitudes that they felt were nurtured through their SHAPE education. Collectively, these skills clustered around three themes: **understanding people**, **entrepreneurialism**, and **interdisciplinary** insight and capabilities, captured in Figure 1.

SHAPE disciplines are providing graduates with key skills for success

SHAPE degrees equip graduates with the skills they need to develop vibrant and rewarding careers. *Qualified for the Future* presented evidence demonstrating that SHAPE graduates enjoy excellent employment and earnings outcomes when compared with those who study STEM disciplines.[14] The case studies presented in *SHAPE Skills at Work* further illustrate that SHAPE graduates are employable and successful across a range of roles and sectors, and experience fulfilling, challenging careers at the forefront of research-intensive sectors.

SHAPE disciplines furnish students with vital expertise and transferable skills. Due to their understanding of people and culture, SHAPE graduates are successful in sectors from technology and media to energy and infrastructure, where they contribute to socially important developments. SHAPE graduates also make strong progress up career ladders in the early years of their employment, and experience high wage-growth.[15]

14 The British Academy, *Qualified for the Future*, pp. 8-9.
15 Ibid, pp. 16-17.

This illustrates how SHAPE graduates' strengths in critical subject expertise and transferable skills allow them to pursue rewarding and diverse jobs across a breadth of sectors.

> *"Humanities and social sciences help us appreciate what the **real impacts** are on **real people**".*
>
> Director, Planning, WSP

Research has shown that while on average SHAPE graduates earn less than STEM graduates immediately after graduation, the gap in earnings between SHAPE and STEM narrows considerably ten years after graduation.[16] Additionally, graduates who have studied SHAPE disciplines demonstrate flexibility and choice in career paths — they are more likely to be able to change sectors and roles voluntarily, without wage penalty, in comparison to STEM graduates.[17] The case studies in this report also reflect this flexibility; those interviewed discussed their varied career paths, which include upskilling through postgraduate education, acquiring knowledge alongside their core SHAPE skills, and progressing into perhaps unexpected sectors, such as energy and technology.[18] Such flexibility will not only be important in the rapidly changing future of work, but also demonstrates the value of SHAPE degrees to individual graduates.[19]

Not only did our case study participants value the subject-specific content of their degrees — from a passion for the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (Product Lead, Android Machine Learning, p.23), to dissertations on the Cold War (Vice Chairman and Managing Partner, p.47), and the Tudor poet Thomas Wyatt (Senior Data Journalist, p.41) — they also noted their degree's transformational impact on their skillset. It is compelling that, throughout the case studies represented here, SHAPE graduates articulate the valuable contribution these disciplines have made not only to their career paths and outcomes, but to their understanding and knowledge of the world and to who they want to be. From the Chief Sustainability Officer at SSE who utilises international political thought to create the conditions for action on net-zero and sustainability (p.38), to the Video and Film Editor who confronted new challenges and found new confidence during her year abroad (p.20), SHAPE degrees can help graduates broaden their horizons and approach their careers in creative and innovative ways.

SHAPE skills are vital to the 21st century economy

The skills that SHAPE disciplines foster are widely recognised as vital across the UK economy.[20, 21] Previous reports by the British Academy demonstrate that the key challenges currently facing our society — including climate change, global pandemics, and the growth of populism — need to be tackled with the insights of the social sciences, humanities and arts alongside those of science, technology, engineering and maths.[22] SHAPE graduates' expertise in understanding culture and human behaviour, as well as their broader skills outlined above, make them employable and highly sought-after in a range of sectors at the forefront of tackling these challenges.[23]

16 The British Academy, *Qualified for the Future,* p. 16.

17 Hedges, S., Meiske, D., Battiston A., and Conlon G. (2019). *Understanding the Career Paths of AHSS Graduates in the UK and Their Contribution to the Economy: Final Report for the British Academy,* London Economics, pp. 50-51.

18 See for example Chief Sustainability Officer, pp.35-37 and Senior Software Engineer Consultant, pp. 20-22.

19 Taylor, A., Nelson, J., O'Donnell, S., Davies, E, and Hillary, J. (2022). *The Skills Imperative 2035: What Does the Literature Tell Us about Essential Skills Most Needed for Work?*, NFER and Nuffield Foundation, p. 8.

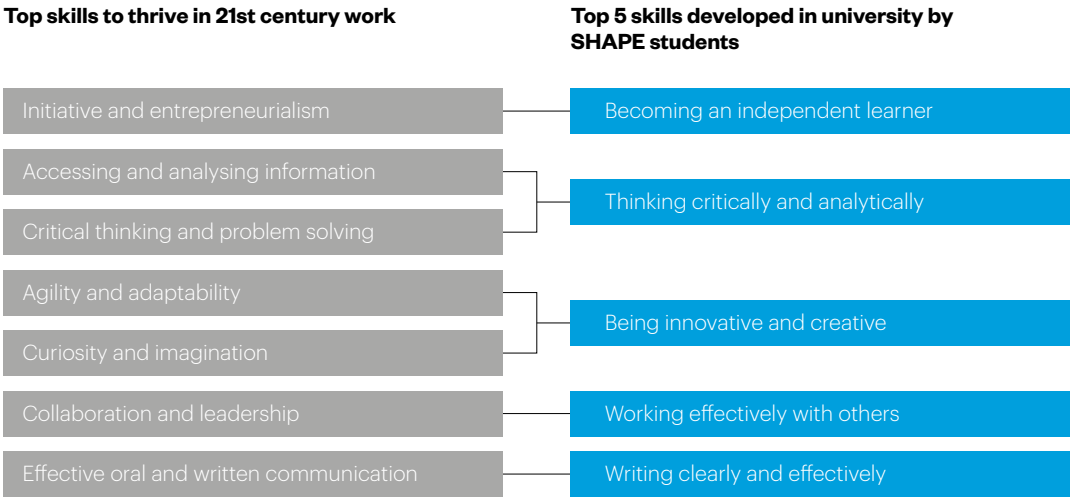
20 The British Academy, *Qualified for the Future,* pp. 13-15.

21 Kingston University London and YouGov (2022), *Future Skills: League Table 2022*, pp. 18-19.

22 The British Academy, *Qualified for the Future*, pp. 25-28.

23 Ibid, p. 10.

Figure 2: SHAPE Skills and future work. Reproduced from *Qualified for the Future* (2020)



As shown in Figure 2, key skills for the 21st century include initiative and entrepreneurialism, accessing and analysing information, critical thinking and problem solving, curiosity and imagination, collaboration and leadership, and effective oral and written communication.[24] Research shows that SHAPE graduates are more likely to have developed creative and social skills during their degree, in comparison to students who have studied STEM subjects. They are also as likely to think that their student experience made a strong contribution to their learning skills, such as writing, thinking critically, analysing, and independent learning.[25] In a global survey of 1,000 business leaders, the Harvard Business Review found that 76% of companies with successful talent recruitment hired graduates with non-STEM degrees.[26] The skills in highest demand among business leaders include strong problem solving, creativity, communication and team working skills.[27]

> *"Creativity is important when working at the forefront of any field, as you can't look at existing examples — rather you have to work things out for the first time and be willing to make mistakes".*
>
> Product Lead, Android Machine Learning - Google

Businesses value skills and outlooks that include adaptability, teamwork, leadership, and communication,[28] which SHAPE degrees are continually demonstrated to nurture. Graduates across STEM and SHAPE disciplines are resilient to economic shocks, highlighting the importance of higher education to career paths.[29] Additionally, an extensive review by the National Foundation for Educational Research suggests that the skills most resilient to changes in the future of work include: problem solving and decision making, critical thinking and analysis, communication, collaboration, and creativity and innovation.[30] SHAPE disciplines excel at nurturing these skills. This

24 The British Academy, *Qualified for the Future*, p. 6
25 Ibid, p. 10.
26 Kavanaugh et al, 'How to Develop a Talent Pipeline for your Digital Transformation'.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Hedges, S., Meiskem D., Battiston, A., Conlon, G. (2019), *Understanding the Career Paths of AHSS Graduates in the UK and Their Contribution to the Economy, London Economics and The British Academy*, pp. 38-40.
30 Taylor et al., *The Skills Imperative 2035*, p. 8.

demand is reflected in the case studies below, as multiple participants discuss how a grounding in SHAPE disciplines provided them with skills to pursue further technical qualifications and postgraduate degrees, in order to supplement the essential subject expertise and transferable skills gained during their undergraduate degree.

> *"A background in business management, augmented by a master's in TV and film, has taken me to a place where I can combine creativity, technology and complex project management to try to capture stories and captivate audiences".*
>
> Video and Film Editor, Spacestation

Additionally, SHAPE graduates are employed across a wider variety of sectors, from retail and food services to professional, scientific and technical, and information and communication.[31] This suggests that SHAPE graduates can work in interdisciplinary contexts, and our case studies are indicative of how graduates can successfully combine their SHAPE degree with further STEM qualifications and training. Regardless of disciplinary background, higher education should equip graduates with the broad skills required for further development and lifelong learning, and our case study participants illustrate the importance of interdisciplinary training and mindsets to ensuring adaptability and flexibility across careers.

> *"The analytical nature of theology and religious studies provided me with a broad range of primary and secondary research skills [….] The big gap was advanced quantitative skills, but I could pick these up quickly through work experience".*
>
> Business Manager and Event Manager, Anotherway Now

Not only are SHAPE graduates active across the UK economy, they are also leading FTSE 100 companies and founding impactful start-ups. Around 59% of the leaders of FTSE 100 companies have backgrounds in SHAPE disciplines, ranging from business and management to languages and history.[32] As many of the UK's most successful start-ups are founded by history graduates as by engineering graduates, and language graduates have founded more successful start-ups in the UK than maths graduates.[33]

SHAPE graduates are also vital to the governing and running of our country. According to the latest available data on the civil service Fast Stream and Fast Track programmes, just over 80% of successful candidates had a background in SHAPE and other non-science disciplines.[34] The trend holds true for Parliament where, following the 2019 election, 65% of MPs studied SHAPE disciplines at degree level, including politics (20%), history (13%), law (12%), economics (10%), philosophy (6%) and English (4%).

31 From HESA *DLHE* data (2018), as published in The British Academy, *Qualified for the Future*, pp. 10-11.

32 Data on the educational background of all current 100 FTSE CEOS gathered through LinkedIn profiles. Analysis undertaken by Tom Hunter, LSE for the British Academy. Initial data gathered April 2021. Updated by the British Academy August 2022.

33 Data on the educational background of 204 UK start-up founders based on data gathered from startups.co.uk and LinkedIn profiles. Analysis undertaken by Tom Hunter, LSE for the British Academy. Data gathered April 2021.

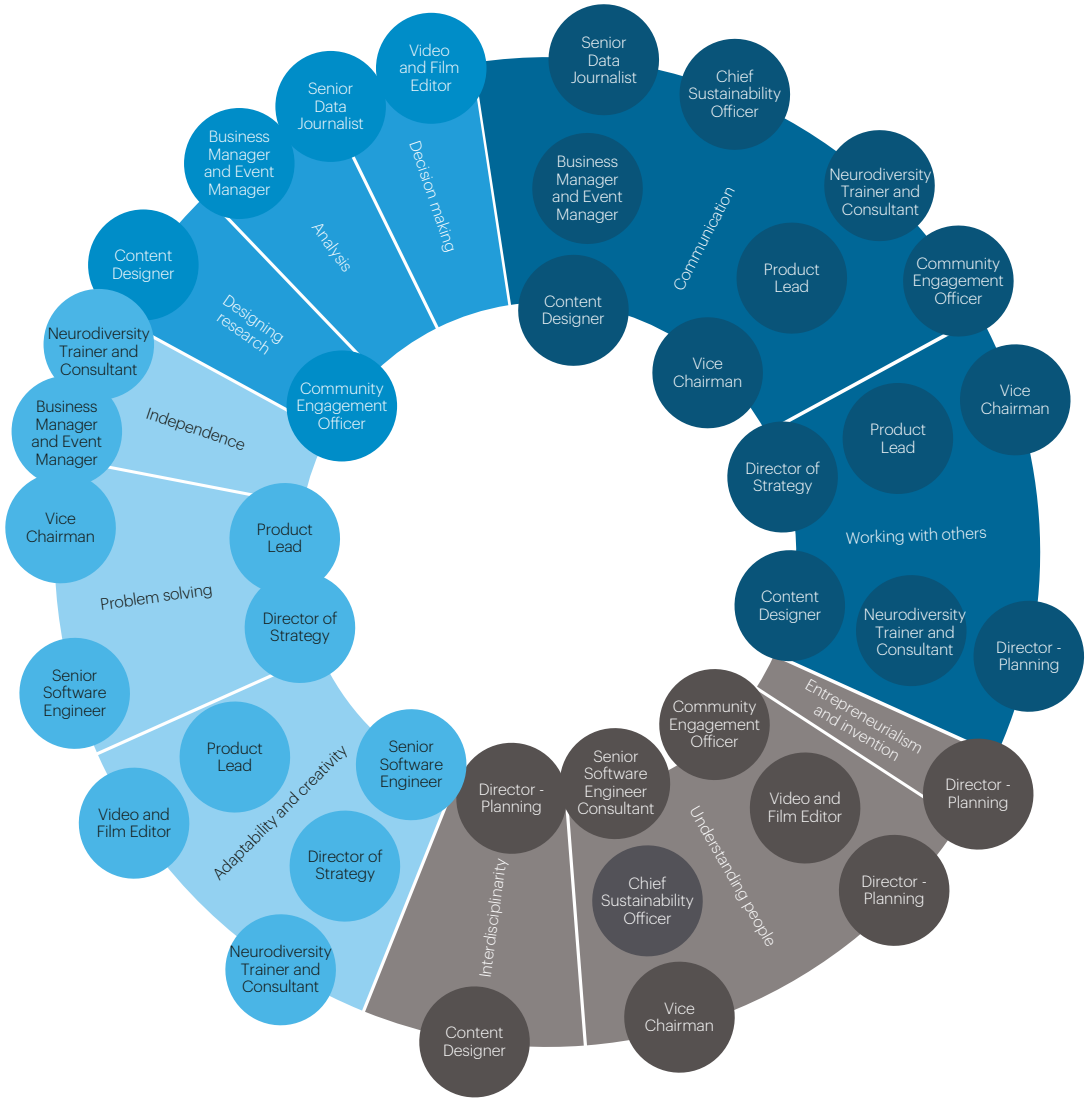
34 *Civil Service Fast Stream: Annual Report*, p. 46.

Delving into the case studies

In addition to the headline messages above, our case studies provide real-life illustrations of the ways in which graduates are harnessing their SHAPE skills in fulfilling and vital careers across the UK economy. Figure 3 shows the variety of skills identified by our case study participants, mapped against the core skills identified in *The Right Skills*, as well as the three additional skill sets identified by our case study participants. Communication, working with others, adaptability and creativity, and problem solving, and the additional skill of understanding people, were most recognised by our participants. Additionally, our case study participants reflected on the use of skills across the core and additional skills groups in their roles, illustrating the variety of vital, transferable skills cultivated by the study of SHAPE disciplines.

> *"I graduated wondering what to do with a philosophy degree. I needed to find a job and while philosophy is great being so general and applicable to many areas, it doesn't push you in a specific direction. You have to figure that out for yourself".*
>
> Product Lead, Android Machine Learning, Google

Figure 3: SHAPE Skills as identified by case study participants



From the management of multiple teams working together to deliver a software product and facilitating workshops, to writing reports and giving presentations to board members, SHAPE disciplines provide graduates with key **communication skills**. Our case study participants have the training to understand and effectively inform audiences, lead complex teams, and answer difficult questions in rapidly evolving circumstances.

The communication skills that Dr Melissa Bennett developed during her doctorate on Caribbean colonial history have been essential to co-ordination with NHS England to address vaccine hesitancy in London through community engagement (pp. 28-30). As Community Engagement Officer, Melissa has helped to identify the target communities and audiences, including Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, young people and poorer socio-economic groups; consider the messages and messengers such groups are receptive to; and develop a strategy to reduce this health inequality by tackling myths and building trust.

> *"My history studies helped me learn to get to the point and communicate accessibly in a great range of outputs, including large reports, articles, and exhibitions for the public".*
> Community Engagement Officer, Greater London Authority

Alongside communication skills, SHAPE disciplines provide graduates with the tools and expertise to examine and explain human behaviour and social functions — all essential for **working with others**. Our participants discuss how this background enables them to better manage the politics and emotions of difficult decisions and complex processes.

Working with others is essential for complex projects requiring the management of multiple teams. A Theology and Religious Studies master's graduate has led NHS hospital strategy in Cambridgeshire since 2019 and through the greatest disruption our health services have ever experienced (pp. 25-27). As Director of Strategy, Dan Northam Jones has been responsible for bringing interdisciplinary teams together on diverse projects, from adapting existing Major Incident Protocols and developing new practices to manage the pandemic, to pooling local research and development resources together with local industry.

> *"Appreciating other people's positions and background is so important in my career, from working in publishing with multidisciplinary teams to running my own businesses".*
> Neurodiversity Consultant and Trainer

SHAPE disciplines also equip graduates with **research skills**, which our participants utilise across sectors, including the media, health, and service sectors. The multidisciplinary nature of SHAPE disciplines also fosters strong **analytical skills**, illustrated by our participants who utilise their skills in qualitative and quantitative analysis in their roles.

> *"The analytical nature of theology and religious studies provided me with a broad range primary and secondary research skills".*
> Director of Strategy, Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Additionally, many of our participants have combined their SHAPE degree with STEM qualifications and training, with great success, highlighting the strength of interdisciplinary thinking and skills nurtured across SHAPE degrees (see, for example, pp. 31-33 and pp. 46-48). As a professional geographer working as Director of Planning at WSP, Ashley Parry Jones has led on some of the largest infrastructural investments ever made in the UK, such as Thames Tideway Tunnel and HS2. Ashley's skills help facilitate the success of construction projects, including arriving at fair compensation, ensuring

individuals' and communities' voices are heard, and applying enterprise to squeeze the maximum benefit possible from infrastructure projects. Ashley notes that infrastructure is much more than construction and engineering — it is fundamentally about understanding people and communities, and includes key quantitative and qualitative analytical skills to provide solutions for communities affected by large-scale construction projects.

As with all the greatest challenges facing society, achieving net-zero is not only a scientific and engineering challenge, but a human one. There are innumerable social questions that must be considered to ensure a just transition, from fair green taxation and ensuring new energy generation to an opportunity for wide economic benefits that address inequalities rather than reinforce them. As Chief Sustainability Officer at one of the Big 6 energy providers, Rachel McEwen applies political theory to ensure change across consumers and organisations.

Our participants, with degrees ranging from business management to anthropology and archaeology, are also comfortable **handling complex information**, **working independently** and **making decisions**. Demonstrative of this independence and confidence, around half of the case study participants chose to study abroad as part of their UK degree or further learning, and around a third have been involved in a start-up at some point in their careers, ranging from app development to community sports and arts providers.

The case studies illustrate the ways in which SHAPE disciplines nurture **problem-solving skills**, which are part and parcel of the rapidly evolving tech sector, and the bread and butter of service industries. Our participants also discuss how SHAPE disciplines, from philosophy to geography, equip graduates with the **flexibility**, **comfort with uncertainty** and **creativity** to be successful in fast moving sectors where there is rarely a blueprint to follow, such as the technology, media, and energy sectors.

> *"Being able to work in this uncertainty — making decisions, balancing demands now and anticipating future needs while working within constraints — is something I have brought with me from my philosophy bachelor's and master's degrees".*
>
> Senior Software Engineer Consultant

The case studies also reveal how disciplines from across SHAPE — from history to anthropology — **underpin innovation in diverse ways**, from guiding the development of Machine Learning, AI and technology products (pp. 19-21) to research that builds local assets (pp. 46-48). Studies have found that a breadth of high-level skills from across multiple disciplines, including those related to system thinking, are essential to tackling future trends and challenges, such as environmental sustainability, increasing inequality and rapid technological change.[35] The case studies sampled here resonate with and give voice to the high-level skills that employees with SHAPE backgrounds and skills are repeatedly found to demonstrate.

Finally, every one of these case studies illustrate how social sciences, humanities and arts graduates are meeting the needs of industries and employers across the UK economy in sectors as cutting-edge as Machine Learning or as vital to our wellbeing as NHS strategy. Whether it is through delivering infrastructure (pp. 31-33), engaging local communities (pp. 28-30), or developing new cultural assets (pp. 46-48), these case studies give an insight into how SHAPE graduates are contributing to the UK economy, society and culture.[36]

35 Bakhshi, H., Schneider, P. (2017), *The Future of Skills: Employment in 2030*, Nesta and Pearson, p. 14.

36 This supports findings in *Knowledge Exchange in the SHAPE Subjects,* which outlines the role SHAPE knowledge exchange plays in developing regional industrial strategies, local assets, and supporting regional entrepreneurialism. The British Academy (2021), *Knowledge exchange in the SHAPE disciplines,* pp. 8-9.

SHAPE skills at work: 12 case studies

Sharika Ajaikumar

Spacestation
Video and Film Editor

Complex decision making
Creativity
Understanding people

Oli Gaymond

Google
Product lead, Android Machine Learning

Working with others
Communication
Problem solving
Creativity and adaptability

Rachel Morgan Trimmer

Self-employed
Neurodiversity Consultant and Trainer

Working with others
Communication
Creativity
Independence

Dan Northam Jones

Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Director of Strategy

Working with others
Interdisciplinarity
Creativity
Problem solving

Dr Melissa Bennett

Greater London Authority
Community Engagement Officer

Designing research
Understanding people
Communication

Ashley Parry Jones

WSP
Director - Planning

Interdisciplinarity
Working with others
Understanding people
Entrepreneurialism and invention

Rachel McEwen

SSE plc
Chief Sustainability Officer

Understanding people
Communication

Angus Knowles-Cutler

Deloitte
Vice Chairman, Managing Partner, Mergers, Acquisitions and Technology

Solving complex problems
Working with others
Understanding people
Effective communication

Tom Calver

The Sunday Times
Senior Data Journalist

Quantitative and qualitative analysis
Communication
Decision making

Amanda Dimmock

Event Communications
Content Designer

Interdisciplinarity
Communication
Working with others
Designing research

Ella Stacey

AnotherWay Now
Business Manager and Event Manager

Independence
Communication
Quantitative and qualitative analysis

Alex Keliris

Self-employed
Senior Software Engineer Consultant

Solving complex problems
Adaptability and flexibility
Understanding people

Making the cut

Courage and creativity of an International Business Studies graduate to tell stories as a technical film editor

Sharika Ajaikumar

Video and Film Editor, Spacestation

Sectors	Information and communication Arts, entertainment and recreation
SHAPE education	Television, Radio and Film MA, Syracuse University International Management BSc, Warwick Business School, University of Warwick
SHAPE skills at work	Complex decision making
	Creativity
	Understanding people

A background in business management, augmented by a master's in TV and film, has taken me to a place where I can combine creativity, technology and complex project management to try to capture stories and captivate audiences through film editing.

SHAPE education

My undergraduate degree was in International Management at the University of Warwick — a very broad subject with many options, which allowed me to study a year of degree-level French and Spanish and do a year abroad. I loved this year as I was able to work in Beijing, study business, and learn Mandarin at Peking University. It brought the subject to life and was a perfect way to experience a new culture. This year forced me to confront so many challenges, from picking up the language to making new contacts and building a new life. Beijing is also a great city, with great food, a mix of city environments and natural sites — there is so much to do.

Success in this course and the year abroad gave me confidence to pursue my passion for television and film and complete a master's at Syracuse University. I love the practical side of editing, the creative storytelling, and the oversight of production management. For visual media, America has immense opportunities, and this comprehensive course recognised my broad skills and required no previous film experience.

SHAPE skills at work

Complex decision making

After completing my master's, I started working as an Editor at Spacestation, a small, full-service video production company. As an Editor, I work with a huge number of different types of information and media, and quickly pull it together into a coherent story and high-quality product. The project information includes the client brief, a vast volume of footage from multiple camera angles, audio files, music cues and technical specifications on how the files should be delivered. Often there's approximately 3 hours of footage to go through to create a 5-minute final video product.

To do this successfully, I have to work back from the intended communications outcome to prioritise information and meet the brief. It's important to be organised and disciplined, with a sharp focus on minute details and also important deadlines. I'm often juggling multiple projects at the same time with other editors, so working within the team means I have to make sure the decisions are communicated well and in a timely manner.

This is similar to the research and writing I engaged in during my undergraduate years in International Management. As with editing, studying a social science requires working with a strict brief and curating information to meet the needs of the research question, and meeting multiple deadlines.

Understanding people

In film editing this takes two forms. The first is considering the audience, their reception of the product and its presentation. I don't choose the subject and most of the videos I edit are not for me, so I need to be able to imagine myself as the intended audience. This ranges from entertaining sports fans, informing home chefs, targeting and appealing to consumers, or even helping tell and time a joke in a comedy.

A good example is doing the editing for '40 Days — Anthony Joshua vs Andy Ruiz', a three-part docuseries building up to the fight. I am not a boxing fan, but by watching fights and researching examples I built up a picture of what the audience expects. I love the process of researching to make a film that is visually and emotionally appealing to the audience. I developed this skill of social research during my undergraduate years at Warwick Business School. Exposure to marketing fundamentals and disciplines such as consumer behaviour and behavioural economics was incredibly helpful.

Creativity

What drew me to film editing and storytelling was the blend of creative, technical, digital and project management skills required in this domain. The mix of these skills align well with my interests. I studied a social science since I like the analytical nature of mathematics, but I also enjoy a focus on people, art and culture. Editors are a creative part of the storytelling process and for some projects I've been fortunate to receive writing credit, as my skills are integral to the process of ensuring the footage matches the story they want to tell and the emotions they want to elicit. I am responsible for keeping the audience engaged and invested in the characters. This is achieved through changing several dimensions in each scene. Factors to focus on in this process include the timing of the cuts, choices of camera angles, and stylistic choices including music and sound effects, amongst others, which evoke the intended emotions in the audience.

Work benefits and satisfaction

I love that I can be creative at work while helping my organisation and our clients with their ventures. I also enjoy the process of creating and telling different stories by applying both technical skills and creative expression. Every film project is a unique artistic, social and technical puzzle involving the content you have, the confines of the client brief and the time constraints, out of which a vision is achieved. The power of the technical tools and how quickly the technology and the art form evolve today, for example from 1080p to 4K, also keeps the field exciting.

SHAPE skills in wider life

More broadly, on the personal front, it's become a skill in itself to avoid becoming the 'family editor' and fend off requests to create friends' and family members' wedding and birthday films! Of course, it happens a lot and I do enjoy it. I also feel the year abroad and work placement helped me develop resilience and a thick skin early on, which are very helpful in this line of work. I've been told I am confident, open to criticism and calm under pressure. These were core skills learned working to deadlines on groupwork during both my undergraduate and master's degrees.

Navigating uncharted seas

Philosophy as a vocation for Product Development and Machine Learning in the technology sector

Oli Gaymond
Product Lead, Android ML, Google

Sectors	Professional, Scientific and Technical Information and Communication
SHAPE education	Computer Science MSc, Imperial College, University of London Philosophy MA, University of Reading
SHAPE skills at work	Working with others
	Communication
	Problem solving
	Creativity and adaptability

What should we build and *why*? Google values engineering for the ability to turn ideas into practical solutions, but we also need people who can think more broadly about the context and implications of our work. I see real, *vocational* value in a rounded education, as we need both STEM and other subjects to thrive. The biggest challenges facing society, face society as a whole.

Examples abound in my current area of work applying cutting-edge machine learning to? mobile devices. Machine learning is providing a shift in what is possible with computing, with stunning success in tasks that were previously assumed to be solely the domain of humans. It is presenting profound questions around intelligence and the potential for AI but also more immediate issues with bias and fairness. Broad discussion is needed to ensure we harness the benefits of new technologies while mitigating potential downsides and understanding the ethical and policy implications requires going beyond the implementation challenges. Or, just because it's possible to build something, should we? This is the wheelhouse of SHAPE.

SHAPE education

At school, it's hard to know what career might suit you. So, I prioritised subjects that I enjoyed: economics, philosophy and physics. To me these seemed like three fundamentals: economics is a foundation of human society and explains a lot of its structure, physics is the basis of how everything works in the material world, while philosophy tries to understand the limits of our knowledge and ability to reason.

I was most excited about philosophy and chose Reading as it had strong specialism in Wittgenstein, which was my passion at the time. I graduated wondering what to do with a philosophy degree. I needed to find a job and while philosophy is great being so general and applicable to many areas, it doesn't push you in a specific direction. You have to figure that out for yourself.

I had a successful three years working in consulting, but while going broad has benefits, to really influence something you have to go deeper in a field. I love technology and knew I wanted a deeper understanding, so I did an intensive master's conversion course to computer science at Imperial College. Parts of computer science build upon philosophy, such as logic, but overall, it's very different. Computer science is more defined with its methods and quantifiable with its answers compared to the contradictory and subjective nature of philosophy. During my master's, I found out about Google's Associate Product Manager Programme and was amazed to find a role that combined technical understanding with product and business insight — the what, why and how of product development.

SHAPE skills at work

Teamwork

Product management is like conducting an orchestra — if I were alone, you would hear nothing, but by bringing many diverse teams together, you get a rich, complex but structured sound. My role is to identify and define the problem, make sure each team understands this, and bring them together in the service of solving that problem.

I work with engineers focused on building things, but also with marketing teams on understanding what customers want and how we can communicate our products, as well as legal and UX (user experience) teams — the complete product development ecosystem. While AI and Machine Learning is highly specialist, I play an essential generalist role that is linked to my success in philosophy, which is very broad and interdisciplinary.

Problem solving

Philosophy has helped me to bring clarity to complex situations. When building products, there are lots of different viewpoints from each of the specialist stakeholders and I work to bring them together around the same aim. Similarly, in philosophy you have to work hard to explain what you're trying to do, recognising many approaches and bringing people with you. I find I am comfortable with ambiguity and accepting that there's no definitively right answer out there while working to make the problem tractable. An example may be that regulation changes overnight in one country, impacting 10% of your consumer base. What do you do? You may have limited time to think through the ramifications, come up with a plan and bring many different teams on board.

Communication

Communication is essential to keep people aligned during product development. Only by making sure there is a clear and shared understanding of the problem we're working to solve can you anticipate problems or even head off conflict. Similarly, in philosophy, the ability to clearly structure your thoughts and present them so that others understand is essential to advance your argument. Along with empathy, it's the most effective skill to bring people on board.

Adaptability and creativity

Creativity is important when working at the forefront of any field, as you can't look at existing examples — rather you have to work things out for the first time and be willing

to make mistakes. Philosophy similarly helped me to deal with those situations and not be intimidated by that uncharted sea. Philosophy is still finding novel ways to approach old problems.

Work benefits and satisfaction

I was drawn to technology product management as it combines technical problem solving with the wider business reality of how things get made. I love thinking about how we can make big transformative improvements and feel privileged that I get to work with teams of highly talented people to make this happen. Our industry is still nascent, and things change fast, limiting the value of experience; as such there is much higher value placed on what you can bring today regardless of your age and background.

SHAPE skills in wider life

I find I'm comfortable tackling things from multiple angles and seeing both sides of an argument. It helps me in getting a more nuanced understanding of some of the bigger challenges we're facing in society today.

Authenticity, authors and autism

An English graduate coaching individuals and organisations to work better

Rachel Morgan Trimmer
Neurodiversity Consultant and Trainer, *Self-employed*

Sectors	Business Services Education Technology
SHAPE education	English BA, University of Wales
SHAPE skills at work	Working with others
	Communication
	Creativity
	Independence

An explorational career, being authentic to both myself and with others, underpins what I've been able to do and who I've been able to help. The stories and characters within literature, and the tools to reveal them, make this possible. I am autistic and I have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). By drawing on communication, creative and entrepreneurial skills, I coach individuals and advise organisations on how to 'treat' people with neurodisabilities.

SHAPE education

Long before A-levels and degree choices, I was passionate about English, and an avid reader of Shakespeare and novels. I grew up outside London and my dad would take me to watch Shakespeare plays in London. Due to my autism and early mental health issues, the escapism was important to me as through literature you can access different characters, times and worlds. English was therefore an obvious choice at school along with history, psychology and French.

English as an academic discipline has so much scope. In science your answer is right or wrong, but in English, and many arts and humanities disciplines, it is about interpretation. You can individualise the experience — give the same book to 100 different people and it will be read 100 ways.

Initially, I thought I want to go into marketing, but I chose to study English at university as it is such a passion of mine, and it also combines so much — from art and language to history, geography, and sociology. This sort of breadth gives you lots of career options.

SHAPE skills at work

Communication

Literature connects you to another person through spoken and written words. Good communication makes you feel that the material is made for you, even though the author may not even be with us anymore. People might find this skill surprising for an autistic person, but my English degree helps me structure information through stories and allows me to make communications memorable. This complements the 'hyper-lexic' nature of autism, which gives me a large vocabulary, concise communication, and natural focus on detail.

I work to help organisations reach out to, recruit, employ, develop and retain staff with neurodisabilities. I use communication skills in all stages of the work: from attracting and liaising with customers to delivering seminars and toolkits to large companies. And it's important for me not only to deliver a good talk or service, but to inspire *action* in these organisations. By using the power of words to elicit an emotional reaction, I feel I can move people to action through my talks. This is how you inspire change.

Working with others

Studying fictional and non-fictional texts is like a social science — you try to understand different characters, their motivations and narratives. This gives you tools for working with different people in organisations or as a freelancer. Appreciating other people's positions and background is so important in my career, from working in publishing with multidisciplinary teams to running my own businesses. Helping teams within organisations to work together better is one of my main jobs — to better understand and accommodate those who have a different way of thinking.

Creativity

Studying English has shown me the importance and power of stories, and it gives me the skills to bring information to life in ways that move and inspire audiences. The degree told me that creativity goes hand-in-hand with structure and systems; telling a story requires themes, patterns, and a main narrative, but also affective and purposeful digressions. This is exactly the same with the talks, toolkits and other materials I create. They need to tell a story and bring the topics to life for those using them. It's the creative elements that make it memorable, and much more valuable for customers, such as the use of disparate objects, making surprise links, and using humour tactically.

Independence

My creativity has set me apart in freelance work and starting new businesses. When you market and promote yourself, you need your own *thing*, and for me that includes positivity and using humour effectively and affectively in a challenging and sensitive topic. As an entrepreneur, if you have problems, you have to deal with them yourself and being autistic increases the panic I might feel when stress arises. But my love of reading, and the knowledge and tools I have from studying literature, gives me context in challenging situations when problems arise. Understanding, but also *feeling*, other people's trials and tribulations equips you and helps you through your own.

Work benefits and satisfaction

Autism can make it hard to recognise your own achievements, so I love helping others and seeing them do better. My first company, a career break website, has helped upwards of a million people. More recently, coaching and consulting on behalf of people with neurodisabilities, I truly think I am making a difference. Many people who have been to my talks or used my materials have gone on to be diagnosed and now receive help and better understand their lives because of my work. On the organisation side, I get to see places working better because of the tools I've developed.

I also love the variation in working for myself. I am always creating and making all kinds of things — graphics, presentations, products, documents etc. — and that gives me a lot of pleasure. I can choose to work with those who are genuinely passionate, full of ideas and share my inclusive mindset.

SHAPE skills in wider life

I still love reading and, since I was 4, a book comes with me everywhere. Literature helps me see in and around things and make connections. The degree gives me tools to see deeper and value different layers. When watching film and TV, I appreciate not only the narrative, but also how stories are put together and the references made. These tools drive my enjoyment of visiting attractions and I get much more out of historic or cultural sites for me and for my kids. Right now, I am writing a screenplay, and my degree is helping me craft the story, develop characters, and produce compelling and convincing dialogue. It is cathartic and therapeutic, but above all, it's a privilege.

Constantine to Covid

A theology graduate directing hospital strategy through a global pandemic

Dan Northam Jones

Director of Strategy, Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Sectors	Health and social care Public sector Private sector consulting
SHAPE education	Harkness Fellowship, Harvard Medical School Religion and Society MA, University of Durham Theology and Religion BA, University of Durham
SHAPE skills at work	Working with others
	Interdisciplinarity
	Creativity
	Problem solving

I started working at Cambridge University Hospitals in April 2019. Less than a year in, the hospital had to respond to the biggest challenge in its history: the COVID-19 pandemic. I was part of the senior team of nurses, doctors, and support staff developing and implementing a plan to care for patients and protect staff in a high-pressure and dangerous situation.

Everyone had to work very differently because nobody knew how to run a hospital during a pandemic, so we adapted the whole of the hospital to respond including creating segregated spaces for Covid patients, trebling critical care capacity, rapidly retraining and redeploying staff, and setting up a large testing facility.

The pandemic has been tiring and scary, but the most fulfilling professional experience of my life. It was a privilege to be part of a team in the hospital, the NHS, and even our country at large, pulling together in difficult circumstances. Normally my job is to set our strategy and plan how to deliver it as well as working on projects with others in the hospital and our partner organisations.

SHAPE education

I studied Theology and Religion at the University of Durham, where I focused on the Old Testament and the study of religious groups. I also completed a Harkness Fellowship at the health policy research department at Harvard Medical School, looking at how parts of the ‘Obamacare’ reforms were being implemented and what the NHS could learn.

SHAPE skills at work

Working with others and interdisciplinarity

Like most SHAPE subjects, theology and religious studies are inherently interdisciplinary. I studied ancient languages; examined historical documents and events; researched political, cultural, socioeconomic context; explored theological, philosophical and moral debates; and applied sociology, psychology and anthropology to understand religious experiences.

This broad exposure requires you to learn quickly, identify good data sources and apply the right research methods. This is good grounding for working life — where many problems don't fit into neatly defined categories and so require broad input and a creative mindset to find effective solutions.

Our hospitals and our partners concentrate highly specific expertise in one place, but we also need generalists like me too, who can span the different specialisms and organisations. Being able to learn quickly is vital, and broad interdisciplinary subjects provide a strong grounding in these skills. Emotional intelligence is part of this too; by listening to and working *with* specialists with confidence, generalists bring something valuable but distinctive to specialists.

Research and analysis skills

The analytical nature of theology and religious studies provided me with a broad range of primary and secondary research skills: reading academic literature; conducting interviews, focus groups and participant observation; designing, distributing, and analysing qualitative and quantitative surveys; and interpreting source documents. The big gap was advanced quantitative skills, but I could pick these up quickly through work experience.

I now work with others to research and answer a range of questions. Some have long time horizons and a broad scope, like "how can we anticipate and prepare for future demands on the hospital to make us more resilient?". Others are narrower or immediate, like "how many beds will we need for Covid patients in three days' time?"

Problem solving and creativity

Theology, much like a social science, exposes you to the complexity of real life. Real-world problems combine different disciplines and, crucially, involve different people who bring diverse approaches to similar problems. Management and strategy roles in healthcare — and indeed all sectors — suit open-minded and creative thinkers who can make connections, drawing flexibly on their own knowledge and recognising the expertise of others.

Many of the tasks we face at work aren't well defined at the outset. It takes time and skill to scope out the problem and come up with the right approach given constraints on time and resources. The ability to understand the situation, break complex problems into manageable parts, and then find a practical way forward was a key part of my education that has served me well at work.

Work benefits and satisfaction

Addenbrooke's Hospital has been around for 270 years, and it is a pleasure to work with a diverse range of skilled people in such a trusted and valued institution who are dedicated to using their talents to serve people who are sick. Every day I'm motivated by

our hospital's values: *safe, kind, excellent*. And, though I don't directly care for patients, I know my work is important and I get to see the *real* results — such as 120 new beds on our site to increase capacity and reduce long waits for treatment, which I helped write the proposal for at the start of the pandemic. By working with others to make good decisions, we fix practical problems, which helps the hospital to work better, provide better care and even save people's lives.

SHAPE skills in wider life

A subject like theology nurtures curiosity about the world and how different people experience life. I learned to understand differences in the history, philosophy, rituals, language and music of religious groups, which have been a source of identity and meaning for many people throughout the ages.

From the West Indian Regiments to vaccine regimes

A doctor of history engaging local communities in London

Dr Melissa Bennett
Community Engagement Officer, Greater London Authority
Director, Muswell Hill Rhythmic Gymnastics

Sectors	Local government Public administration and defence Education
SHAPE education	History PhD, University of Warwick World History MA, King's College London History and Politics BA, University of York
SHAPE skills at work	Designing research
	Understanding people
	Communication

It seemed to surprise everyone when I brought my skills and knowledge from a PhD in history into regional government. Humanities subjects like history can be misconceived in local government and the civil service, and these jobs can be misconceived in academia. But I found my background could be applied to anything from addressing vaccine hesitancy and organisational and service change, to listening to communities and better reflecting them in public art.

SHAPE education

I always wanted to go into policy, and I was always fascinated by history and politics but thought that history wasn't a vocational subject. I was very wrong. I did my BA in Politics and History focusing on Caribbean History, Black History, Human Rights and Global Development. During my studies, I did two internships with the Home Office and Government Affairs at Tesco, where I got to see how a big company must work with government and MPs to influence and respond to policy.

I was lucky to continue my research through a master's in World History and Culture, where I specialised in colonial history focusing on the Caribbean region. I secured

funding from the AHRC for a PhD at Warwick University, and I spent time researching at the British Library and was able to study at the Yale Centre for British Art for three months too. My research focus was on photographs of the West India Regiment, the first official majority-Black regiment of British Army, which was active from 1795 to 1924. It's a fascinating early demonstration of Black people being given the same pay and recognition (at least on paper), but the men were not always seen as equals or considered equally capable. I still give lectures and help museums both in the UK and the Caribbean on the visual history of the Caribbean and this regiment.

SHAPE skills at work

Designing research

After finishing my PhD, I returned to regional government to work in community engagement. We support community events, such as the Mayor's annual commemoration of the International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition; I also work on the Mayor's Commission for diversity in the public realm, examining how London's spaces can better reflect minority groups, including the Black, Asian and minority ethnic community, women and disabled Londoners. And as part of the London recovery from Covid, I am helping coordinate the London Community Story grant programme, enabling policy makers to look more broadly at non-traditional insights as evidence.

This work is project-based and based on needs analysis, and this is very similar to planning and conducting research. During my PhD, I developed skills in analysing different sources of information, from hard data, past research, and reports to music and images. As with history, I am using it as evidence and insight into a problem that may result in funding decisions and actions.

Understanding people

Community engagement in London means having to identify, work with, and do my best to reflect an extremely wide variety of stakeholders, communities and demographics. In my PhD, I had to navigate difficult histories and consider different sides of a human problem; the West India Regiments were 'on the wrong side' of history in many senses as a Black group fighting for the colonial power. This background gives me the skills to manage difficult conversations and deal with contentious policy areas. My work in public history let me engage with a broad range of people, giving me confidence approaching and working with different, and often vulnerable and under-represented groups in my role at the GLA.

Right now, I am working with NHS England, taking a community engagement approach, to help London address vaccine hesitancy. We are identifying target groups, considering the messages and *messengers* they are receptive to, and developing a strategy to reduce general health inequalities by listening to communities about their needs and concerns, tackling myths and building trust.

Communication

Communication is heavily linked to understanding people and it works both ways, with policymakers often not understanding communities and the public not engaging with local policy and services. There is the external side of communication — targeting different communities and demographics in London — but there is also the internal working element, which is just as important. I regularly need to distil lots of information into many different concise forms to inform a decision or account for the work my team is doing. My history studies helped me learn to get to the point and communicate accessibly in a great range of outputs, including large reports, articles, and exhibitions for the public.

Work benefits and satisfaction

I love the diversity of my work. I'm always working on multiple projects that vary from events to major service changes. I love connecting with the public and making that bridge between politics and policy, and local services and ordinary people. By using my skills in connecting and communicating with different communities, I feel I am able to shape public life in London. It's so satisfying to be trusted with people's thoughts, their needs and emotions, and then making that tangible for how to run the city.

SHAPE skills in wider life

In my spare time I run the Muswell Hill Rhythmic Gymnastics Club. Many of the skills I use, from the initial confidence to take some risks and invest my time, to the more mundane administration and budgeting work, I can trace back to developing through my studies. It often takes me back to juggling the research, writing, networking and public engagement activities in my PhD. My PhD lives on as I am still invited to speak on Caribbean history and have recently delivered a number of lectures to the British Army on this topic.

Balancing pain and prosperity in national infrastructure

A professional geographer leading surveying and planning

Ashley Parry Jones
Director – Planning, WSP

Sectors	Infrastructure Construction
SHAPE education	Estate Management BSc, Heriot-Watt University Geography BA, University of Kent
SHAPE skills at work	Working with others
	Interdisciplinarity
	Understanding people
	Entrepreneurialism and invention

Social sciences are not just subjects or tools to understand the world, they are a calling. I have worked in planning national infrastructure for nearly 30 years and a social science background provides me with a multi-disciplinary understanding, a value for people, and a sense of enterprise that has helped to oversee some of the largest investments ever made in the UK.

SHAPE education

Growing up in North Wales, geography was everywhere, but I have been captivated by the lights and bustle of cities for as long as I can remember. When it came to choosing a degree, I chose a Geography BA and I always saw it as an art: dealing with imperfect data and messy human behaviour but making sense of it. Also, the great thing about geography is that it includes so much. You can pursue environmental science, sociology, law, politics, even philosophy but with a core spatial element.

I then did a degree in estate management at Heriot-Watt University, which was profession-based, focusing on surveying land; understanding land usage, laws and rights; and presenting geo-spatial data. Early in my career, I became a Chartered Geographer

through the Royal Geographical Society. I see geographical skills as a professional vocation and this membership recognises those professional competencies that are applied and enhanced through experience in work.

SHAPE skills at work

Interdisciplinarity

Infrastructure is a multidisciplinary field. I work with engineers and construction management, as you would expect, but also environmental scientists, community engagement specialists, lawyers, and local, national, and international businesspeople. The role involves identifying land required for an infrastructure project and establishing the legal interests in that land and all areas affected by the development. It requires complex information management with a range of evidence from legal title, spatial, planning, environmental, land use, as well as the business case for the project and difficult cost-benefit decisions.

This multidisciplinary working is in the nature of SHAPE subjects like geography; we are collaborative beings. Geography complements many areas of infrastructure and construction. For example, the Thames Tideway Tunnel required large amounts of land for the 25km, £4bn tunnel. My teams identified the land required and established legal interests, including areas that are *indirectly* impacted. These interests vary, from land-owners, tenants and local communities to environmental impacts and their mitigation.

Understanding and valuing people

When working to deliver, for example, a new airport runway, you are dealing with real people. In infrastructure, I am dealing with some of the most significant investments but also disruptions taking place in people's lives, and it often impacts their greatest assets and cares: their homes. Humanities and social sciences help us appreciate what the *real* impacts are on *real* people.

Mitigating the effects of construction projects or arriving at fair compensation requires a complex social understanding on both the macro and micro scale. Engineers may find this abstract but social sciences bring a sense of sympathy; the process itself can be upsetting. Legislation recognises that impacted communities are not collateral; they are neighbours and must be meaningful partners and can be part of solutions.

With the Thames Tideway Tunnel, my surveying work identified and protected individuals and communities, and made sure people's voices were heard. Most of the land acquired along the Thames is going to be returned to the public, creating new spaces.

Entrepreneurialism and invention

SHAPE subjects bring enterprise and invention to the construction process. Subjects like geography are able to recontextualise building works in inventive ways and ensure positive impacts can be felt beyond the initial service user or 'customer'. In the journey of proposing and delivering a large infrastructure project, SHAPE understandings help to identify and appreciate an incredible range of possibilities along the way. They also help to eke out every possible benefit that can be found, including many different types of mitigations or compensations.

For example, if Heathrow's Third Runway is approved, it will be about much more than transport infrastructure. The success of the programme relies on producing benefits for local communities and working with those who would be affected. Consideration does

need to be put towards solutions to mitigate the impact on local residents, such as new green space and amenities, new pedestrian and other connections, and improvements to wider infrastructure for the benefit of travellers as well as airport workers.

Work benefits and satisfaction

I love the complexity of construction projects. I get to investigate historical and geographic clues and it is rewarding to think about the land-use layers and spaces. The past interacts with the present, and even the future, through infrastructure. My work is highly collaborative and is always looking to the future and thinking about how everyday life can be better.

SHAPE skills in wider life

Having a background in a broad subject like geography, I am a magpie with many interests that have been nurtured through studying and working. I live in London, and I see the city in many different ways, so in my spare time I occasionally lead walking tours, which I research and write, to explore historical areas. Geography also complements my passion for sailing, with my geographical instincts helping with navigating and appreciating the interactions with the sea and atmosphere.

Making the unlikely inevitable

Political theory applied in a 'Big 6' energy provider to drive social and environmental sustainability

Rachel McEwen

Chief Sustainability Officer, SSE plc

Sectors	Professional, Scientific and Technical Electricity and Gas
SHAPE education	Political Thought MA, University of St Andrews Economics BA, Abertay University Dundee
SHAPE skills at work	Understanding people
	Communication

It's about human beings. Applying SHAPE subjects is the only way to ensure a successful and just transition to a decarbonised economy. Moving to net-zero is not just about engineering and the environment, it is going to be socially and economically disruptive. As Chief Sustainability Officer in a major energy firm, I have to draw on a multidisciplinary team of earth scientists, economists and geographers to examine not only the environmental impacts of energy production and delivery, but also the social ramifications of changes in the supply chain.

SHAPE education

After my Highers, I got into Dundee Technical Institute initially to study Retail and Distribution Management, but the course had many broad options and, by following my interest, I actually graduated with an economics degree. I loved economics and politics in the college and I dedicated the final year to student politics and activism. Over this year I was part of the political drive for the Institute to gain university designation by successfully challenging some of the arbitrary rules for university status.

Energised by my year in student activism, I wanted to change the world and I spent around 10 years in politics as campaigner, election agent, special adviser and, once, even a candidate for Scottish Parliament. I loved the activities, accountability and opportunities working in government, and I worked closely with the civil service.

I went back to university after about 10 years in politics to gain additional skills and qualifications about government and governing. I studied a master's in international political thought at the University of St Andrews part time. I love the way that people from

non-traditional backgrounds have access to world-class education experience. I chose this political philosophy master's as I was passionate about higher-level statecraft, and I had half a plan to work in international relations. I found studying this master's while balancing a full-time job with SSE had a profound impact on me and made me more thoughtful. The International Political Thought master's ended up being vocational and very applicable, and helped me advance in the company where I was.

SHAPE skills at work

Understanding people

I encounter analogies between my background in politics and economics at work all the time. Working to drive social and environmental sustainability within my company, rather than campaign and lobby senior decision-makers, my approach is to create the conditions where actions that improve sustainability are not only possible, but inevitable. This is heavily influenced by my master's and an understanding of political and social change that emerged after the Cold War. Rather than viewing significant changes in terms of the actions and ambitions of individuals such as statesmen, this approach looks at the conditions that made historical upheavals possible.

These are also tools to understand business and employment. Thinking about the wider conditions behind a transition, I recognise there are then many participants in the system and situation; only some make the big decisions, but many more apply demand and other pressures.

An example is the voluntary adoption of net-zero carbon targets for the company long before regulatory pressure. To achieve this, I needed to identify and bring together those with a stake in the business with environmental and net-zero priorities; surprisingly, this was not just customers and members of the public, but also key groups of investors and shareholders. Despite the huge commercial consequences of an energy company aiming for net-zero, once pressure for that decision had been unified and brought to the decision makers, it was inevitable.

Communication

Communication is the thing I do most, and it takes all forms; it's simply essential in any part of a business at this level. A large part is talking, whether it is in meetings with SSE's investors, presenting to the board, instructing and supporting my team, or liaising with energy regulators. I need to have a firm grasp of the company's complex activities, the changing socio-economic environment in energy production, and the opportunities around us, and be able to convey them in ways that get heard and remembered. For this I draw on my background in student and national politics.

Report writing is also a major component and, as with reports for my undergraduate and master's degrees, I have to answer to briefs regarding the information and answers in the reports we produce. I don't only write reports for auditing and regulatory purposes; in 2020 we were the first energy company to publish a social strategy: 'Supporting a Just Transition'. This report detailed the steps SSE are taking to consider the social implications of moving to net-zero including local jobs and skills, communities and using the transition to improve equality.

Work benefits and satisfaction

It sounds naïve, but it really is about changing the world. Working in corporate sustainability is a lot like being in politics, but within the business sector. I love that we

are driving a business to consider and take practical actions by building and revealing profitable solutions not only for the company but people and planet too.

SHAPE skills in wider life

Both my undergraduate and master's degrees have driven my interest in current affairs, and I am an avid reader. I worry that people are in their own echo chambers but the skills I have allow me to better make up my own mind about politics, by reading and understanding ideas outside my own opinions. I learned through my own background in politics and political theory that trust comes from people listening and being exposed to all perspectives and I am passionate about people accessing good information and expertise.

Great expectations

An English graduate working in data journalism to help people understand their lives and plan their future

Tom Calver

Senior Data Journalist, Sunday Times

Sectors	Information and Communication Media Education
SHAPE education	Investigative Journalism MA, City, University of London English Language and Literature BA, University of Oxford
SHAPE skills at work	Quantitative and qualitative analysis
	Communication
	Decision making

Good journalism gives voices to marginalised people, tells stories that would otherwise go untold, and helps us understand what happens in our daily lives so we know what to expect in the future. Over the COVID-19 pandemic, it's never been clearer that good communication, including data, is essential to influence behaviour and provide reassurance in frightening and uncertain times. Pursuing English and investigative journalism at university has not only equipped me for work, but has taught me about different perspectives, has helped support my mental health, and has allowed me to further my own interests.

SHAPE education

As a child, I loved the humanities and was a prolific reader. I wasn't bad in maths either, and chose a slightly unusual mix of A-levels: English, Maths, Further Maths and Physics, with an AS in Art. I enjoyed English the most, but one of the best things about learning physics was my teacher, who would cite Charles Dickens or Lewis Carroll during lessons to explain the laws of thermodynamics! I like the challenge of English. Maths and science are quite formulaic, whereas in English you choose your own journey and engage your brain in a different way.

I chose an English degree as I didn't know what I wanted to do career-wise and I didn't want to narrow down my options. I knew I wanted to do something that I felt was important and made a difference, rather than something that would pay the bills (an idea I probably inherited from my parents). At Oxford we studied every era of the English language, from the seventh century to today. The course made me consider the changing role of the writer in relation to the audience, helped me to reflect on the world and

introduced me to philosophy.

My dissertation was on Thomas Wyatt, the court poet of Henry VIII, who may have been romantically involved with Anne Boleyn around the same time as the king. I examined his original manuscripts to look for evidence of anxiety over this period, such as corrections or redactions. I decided to become a journalist and completed a master's in investigative journalism, during which I became interested in data journalism.

SHAPE skills at work

Quantitative and qualitative analysis

My job is interpreting statistics, explaining them, and telling stories from them in a way that people want to read. I identify and digest a great volume and range of evidence and apply a humanities style of thinking and research: propose an essay problem, build the case around it drawing on evidence, follow rabbit holes, reach out to people, and keep developing and challenging my thesis.

I'll often begin an article with an interesting statistic. For example, after the UN climate report published in August 2021, I wondered if there was a constructive angle about how people in the Britain could help achieve net-zero. I discovered that Peterborough had the highest number of solar panels per household in Britain, and I wanted to find out why an otherwise unremarkable town was such an eco-outlier. I spoke to residents, councillors, volunteers and combined it with data about other factors that made Peterborough stand out. Perhaps unsurprisingly, I found that most who chose solar panels and electric cars did so for financial benefit: the wider lesson here is that for climate policies to succeed, they must work financially for people.

Decision-making

Through the COVID-19 pandemic and the Prime Minister's daily briefings, we learned how clear and concise data communication is essential for getting messages across. To do that, you need to think about your audience and purpose, what information to include, how messages are phrased, the precise use of words, and the vessel used to deliver the message. Balance and efficiency are key, making the communication process efficient for the audience and yourself too.

Studying English helped me to be better at absorbing information and also taught me to bear the audience in mind. We have to avoid writing a Wikipedia page — throwing statistics unfettered at the audience —and, instead, take them on a journey through a mixture of data and stories. Particularly with science writing, subtle language choices can make a big difference to whether readers understand something or not.

Communication

As Senior Data Journalist, I have to explain complicated topics to a broad, time-pressured audience, and it's essential to have both a high standard and flexibility in the use of prose to get across what you want. When writing articles, the audience is the key driver. I try to develop a structure that will take the reader on a journey and get the right balance between statistics and stories. My background in English taught me you need every sentence to have meaning and to add to what came before. Anything that doesn't move the story or the argument on has to go. Over the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become clear to me that the effective communication of facts to a wide audience can positively change behaviour, give reassurance in frightening times, or simply help people make sense and plan.

Work benefits and satisfaction

I enjoy being able to make a difference in people's lives. Firstly, by sharing stories that wouldn't be told and giving voices to marginalised people: that is what any good journalism should do. Secondly, explaining complex but potentially frightening data and situations, where the stakes of good communication are high. It can be our job to teach people what to expect in the foreseeable future.

SHAPE skills in wider life

As well as helping with my career, reading and appreciating literature has personal benefits like aiding mental health, offering consolation and providing perspective, and satisfying my personal interests. Outside of my main job, I now use the skills I learnt at university to teach journalism at City University.

Of the people, for the people, by the people

Applying psychology to further and champion human rights

Ella Stacey

Business Manager and Event Manager, Anotherway Now

Sectors	Not for Profit Events
SHAPE education	Social and Applied Psychology MSc, University of Kent Psychology BSc, University of Manchester
SHAPE skills at work	Independence
	Communication
	Quantitative and qualitative analysis

I'm so lucky that I get to learn for a living. Drawing on my background in psychology, I run events that shine a spotlight on human rights issues, and we have a simple but powerful mantra: identify the problem, find the right audience, start the conversation, and be a part of the solution. My job means that I get to talk about my passion — women's rights — on Sundays and on Mondays.

SHAPE education

I always had an interest in human behaviour and choosing psychology — a broad and varied subject — gave me time and exposure to develop my passions while developing knowledge and skills. During my undergraduate studies, I was keen to do a year abroad and I was drawn to the USA where studying psychology is quite a different practice — much more applied; I did my third year at the University of California Santa Cruz, which opened my eyes to other types of psychology.

I'd always been really interested in race and race relations but had assumed that careers were all in community work. But social psychology is much bigger in the USA and studying there showed me how to build my passion into my career without a PhD. Nevertheless, I knew I still wanted to earn a master's degree to prove my capability. This led me to the University of Kent as one of the few UK universities with a social psychology specialism.

SHAPE skills at work

Independence

A lot of higher education is self-driven, and psychology is no different. But it's also about setting yourself apart; I needed the self-determination to work independently, completing interesting and engaging research that wasn't just target based. I had to be proactive in seeking feedback to do better than average and distinguish myself for opportunities, such as the study abroad programme.

My work now is similar. In my role, I am part organiser, part researcher, part problem solver, part communicator. That means I have to juggle a lot of competing priorities across a broad workload. The topics we deliver events on are powerful social justice issues. Some are recommended to us based on a charity's work or an academic's research. Some are a product of reading I do in my personal life or research I've followed at work. Usually, I'll have started thinking about and planning the next event while we run a current one.

Communication

Communicating with people is something I love, but it's chicken and egg for me. Did psychology teach me how to understand people, or do I love the discipline because I have that talent? It's probably a balance; what is innate to me is the passion I have working with people, for people, and on subjects about people.

Communicating is a huge part of my job. We couldn't run events without it. But because we take difficult and emotional topics, the communication must be deeper. At our last in person event, in March 2020, we covered Female Genital Mutilation. All the logistics were in place: right audience, right content, right coverage. But because we want to be driven by people, not aims, we needed a brave discussion which pushes boundaries, and that is only possible with the right atmosphere. I have to work to create and communicate a welcoming, loving atmosphere that doesn't centre around the research but around the people — both those at the heart of the issue, and those invited to talk, learn and connect.

Quantitative and qualitative analysis

Psychology is a real research-intensive degree. I think most people expect that the research takes the form of experiments and surveys, but they might not appreciate how much qualitative research goes into designing those experiments and how much quantitative analysis is involved drawing conclusions. During my undergraduate degree, I had weekly seminars and tutorials on statistics and modelling. To be honest, I initially hated those lessons, but it has been so useful for my work in understanding the wider world and has taught me how to look beyond/behind the headlines.

In my current role, I still do a mix of qualitative and quantitative. My role as a researcher is to explore the reality of big click-bait issues. This involves a lot of qualitative research: literature reviews, meta-analysis, and interviews, among others. But we also have to understand the numbers behind the stories, and the trends involved in the issues. I find this is especially true when we work with university partners, as the academics we partner with communicate with this type of evidence.

Work benefits and satisfaction

My job has really changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. I've had to learn new skills quickly, like video editing, and use them to make sure we keep producing content about our events across social media channels. I also use my existing skills very differently;

I do less managing of people and processes, and instead have time for wider learning, research, creative problem solving and communicating.

One thing that has stayed consistent is how flexible my work is. I've always been able to work from home a lot — most of our clients and partners are global and so I'm used to conducting business via digital platforms from the sofa. This also means that no two days are the same: one day I can be focused on the business side of the organisation, dealing with finances and regulations, and exploring new ideas, the next I'm out and about working with venues or filmmakers or interacting with an audience. This means I'm still learning constantly, which is my biggest priority and source of satisfaction. Similarly, my career has been unpredictable so far, but I see that as a positive; it's made me resilient and adaptable, so I'll be okay in the future even if things change.

SHAPE skills in wider life

The skill from university that feels incredibly relevant right now is critical analysis. Being able to scan dramatic headlines or alarming claims, then taking a moment to examine the facts, has been very necessary in the last couple of years. This of course helps me in my everyday life, as I can spot when a media outlet might be trying to twist the facts to get my attention. I believe this also makes me quite a careful citizen, keen to not give my voice or attention to causes that aren't worthy. In the same breath, being analytical of the world has made me a more politically engaged member of society.

Equal parts fact, equal parts force

A history graduate as therapist/diplomat in mergers and acquisitions

Angus Knowles-Cutler

Vice Chairman, Managing Partner, Mergers, Acquisitions and Technology, Deloitte (Retired)

Sectors	Financial and insurance Public administration and defence
SHAPE education	Japanese, Monbukagakusho Scholarship History MA, University of Cambridge
SHAPE skills at work	Solving complex problems
	Working with others
	Understanding people
	Effective communication

I have worked in business services assisting mergers and acquisitions for 30 years. I love the combination of being hands-on with data, creative with language, and being trusted to look behind the scenes at how businesses and individuals are thriving or struggling. Many think financial services are simply data driven but, in reality, it's more about how you relate with people, appreciate different sides to complex problems, and communicate well.

SHAPE education

Studying history was a vocation in itself and a sandbox to investigate complicated human issues. The process of contributing to the academic knowledge-base challenges and refines your ability to think and communicate. I chose to study history as I was fascinated by the combination of politics, social behaviour, and psychology. I specialised in the history of intelligence services: I was studying at the end of the Cold War, when so much new evidence was becoming accessible as historical archives were being made publicly available.

For my thesis I assisted a professor writing a book on the history of MI6. As part of this I visited the Kew National Archives, where I discovered startling evidence from German cables proving that, in 1937, the UK government knew of the planned Anschluss in Austria before the annexation happened. After my first professional role at Bain & Company,

I could see the potential of Japan at this point in time, both as a place to work and for its economic outlook, and went there to learn Japanese through the Monbukagakusho Scholarship, which combined work and language studies.

SHAPE skills at work

Solving complex problems

Mergers, acquisitions and carve-outs involve difficult decisions and very complex processes. There are so many dimensions, including the politics of interested parties, the employees, venture capitalists; the financing and business performance dimension; and branding and public relations. There are also complex research processes involved to evaluate a business and consider different options. The approach must be fact-based: not jumping to conclusions but applying good qualitative research and data analysis skills.

For example, in the 1980s when Guinness acquired multiple distilleries, a vital question was how to consolidate some business functions while retaining individual branding; this is actually not a huge leap from the disciplines required in a history degree, nor any other humanities subject.

Working with others and understanding people

Business and finance activities are centred around human behaviour, and you must be able to manage the politics and emotions of situations, act as an independent broker, and be sensitive to different parties but able to deliver hard truths. To sell and provide a business service, you must show competency with the problem, but also show you are a person the client wants to open-up to and do business with. I often find myself acting as therapist-cum-diplomat, which harks back to my original interest in history and how individual psychology can lie behind titanic global changes.

An example of this was in the acquisition of GoFly by EasyJet. While each company provided a similar product — low-cost, short-haul flights — they had radically different operations and internal cultures. The skill I try to bring is to help people find common ground, and this comes from a lifelong passion for human behaviour nurtured through a humanities degree, always asking ‘will this work with real people?’. As most careers develop, I have found people use their technical skills less and less, and roles become perhaps 95% drawing on being understanding and considerate.

Effective communication

Business services depend upon exchanging information and conveying messages effectively, from interpersonal meetings to reports and presenting to boards or shareholders. My communication skills were fostered through my history degree, including considering your audience and what they are receptive to, and how you will get the change you want. In business communication, you want to get to the central problem or main questions quickly and provide a summary early on. And just like in historical research, be sure to answer the question, breaking it down logically where required and addressing it systematically. Stylistically you need to stick to the point, use efficient language and your arguments must be made a mixture of fact, language and forcefulness.

Work benefits and satisfaction

What I love is the people. I have met *the* most interesting people from all works of life and helped hundreds of businesses across the world. It is rewarding to deliver their business requests and guide them in a logistically and emotionally hard process. In mergers and acquisitions, just about everything is revealed — warts and all. The work is energising and inspires me to take on additional voluntary and public roles, such as the Local Education Partnership — the Mayor's skills agenda for London — and assisting start-ups. Pay is also very good in a lot of consulting, and this has given me so many options and allowed me to pursue a great range of passions.

SHAPE skills in wider life

My history degree has given me the confidence to follow passions and hobbies in life as well as give back through voluntary public roles. Studying any of the humanities fosters an expansive interest in the world and the people around you. The multidisciplinary nature of these subjects gives you confidence to learn new things and a background in history is a solid base when meeting people. It has helped and inspired me to travel and really appreciate different ways of living.

For example, through helping a business in New Orleans, I had my first exposure to Vodou and other cultural elements of the African diaspora. Colleagues described to me how enslaved people arriving in the Americas had nothing except for their religion, music and oral tradition. I was fascinated to find out more about what has happened to these practices over 250 years and subsequently visited Cuba and East Africa to witness spectacular Vodou festivals. Being a history graduate, I am organically drawn to this type of immersion and inclusion.

Regional and national assets of meaning

An archaeologist designing exhibitions to tell stories

Amanda Dimmock
Content Designer, Event Communications

Sectors	Leisure and tourism Cultural Education
SHAPE education	Museum Design MA, University of Leicester Archaeology and Anthropology BA, University of Saskatchewan
SHAPE skills at work	Interdisciplinarity
	Communication
	Working with others
	Designing research

The path to my career started with a museum visit. When I was a teenager, I travelled with a bagpipe band from Canada to Glasgow to compete at the World Pipe Band Championship. We stayed in dorms near the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum which I explored between practices. Being from the comparatively young city of Saskatoon, I fell in love with the richness of history on display — the objects and their amazing stories — I was hooked on museums!

I love the power of museums to create connections across time, enabling us to learn from our past; between people, helping to build empathy and understanding; and within communities, fostering a sense of unity through collective heritage. As fate would have it, the company which redeveloped the museum that inspired my passion 20 years ago, is the company which I work for today, Event Communications.

SHAPE education

I did my undergraduate degree in archaeology and anthropology at the University of Saskatchewan and chose this subject as it opened up a window to diverse civilizations past and present and their material culture. I particularly loved experimental archaeology, which attempts to bridge the gap between tangible and intangible heritage through

experiments to better understand how objects were made or used. In this vein, I tried my hand at flintknapping, lost-wax casting, mosaic making, pottery, etc.

My professors encouraged me to become involved with the university museum, where I gained valuable experience in programming events and curating temporary exhibitions. I knew I wanted to work with museums, but I wanted to 'do it right' and so applied for the internationally renowned museum studies programme at the University of Leicester, which gave me comprehensive instruction on all aspects of museum management including collections care, educational programming, outreach, and curation.

SHAPE skills at work

Communication

Exhibitions are the primary way in which museums communicate with their visitors. This requires storytellers, people with skills in the social sciences, humanities, and arts, to convey a collections relevance to the general public. In my role as a Content Designer, communication skills are vital and varied. I think deeply about the intended audience of the exhibition and how best to engage them. It might be through words, audio, graphic imagery, interactives, film, immersive environments, art installations or objects — the possibilities are infinite — and we communicate on so many levels and scales. On the smaller scale, this could be how to use objects to create meaning through their arrangement and interpretation. Then, on a larger scale, how to evoke mood and atmosphere to choreograph the experience. For the Etches Collection: Museum of Jurassic Marine Life in Kimmeridge, we created an overhead CGI aquarium with scenes that varied from tranquil waters to violent attacks! All the scenes were inspired by the stories of the fossils on display.

To develop these engaging exhibitions, we are in constant conversation with the client and their stakeholders, from phone calls, meetings, to presentations and reports, which include written descriptions, thematic diagrams, drawings and visualisations. My education set the foundations for these communication skills.

Interdisciplinarity

Museums are where many disciplines come together, not only among the staff within the museum, but also an expansive network of consultants and contractors. Working on the Oman Across Ages Museum, one of the largest museum projects in the Arabian Gulf, I worked with subject experts in Geology, Archaeology, Biology, History, Architecture, Economy, Politics, Music, and Art. I also collaborated with a multidisciplinary team of project managers, designers, fit-out contractors, AVSW specialists, model makers, artists, script writers, etc. My educational background, which touched on so many different subject areas, provided me with the skills so that I could engage in meaningful conversations with such a diverse cast of specialists.

Working with people

Content designers are the 'middle person' in the triangle between audiences, experts, and designers. Curators have the specialist knowledge far beyond the general public, and my role is to advocate on behalf of the audience to help make the story more easily understood. This is not about dumbing down content but rather making it more accessible to a wider range of visitors. I work diplomatically with subject experts to refine the level of detail, while ensuring accuracy. Once the key messages of the story are agreed, I collaborate with graphic and 3D designers to develop how the story will be told within the museum experience. Group project work in my undergraduate and master's programme gave me a taster of collaborative working.

Designing research

The content design process is very similar to module and project work at university. After my master's dissertation, I remember thinking: 'I never have to write an essay again!' — how wrong I was! The work I do now is very similar to academic research and essay writing. Responding to an invitation to tender initiates an intense period of research and development to respond to questions and pull together a proposal. Similarly, the whole process from commission to completion includes huge research components, working to brief, and within strict deadlines.

Work benefits and satisfaction

What I love about my job is that I'm constantly learning and connecting with passionate and knowledgeable people. Even the most niche topic can be intensely interesting when learned from an enthusiastic curator or brought to life by a talented project team. It is also tremendously rewarding seeing the final exhibition come to life and visitors engaging with the experience. Each museum project is like your baby; for example, with the EPIC Museum of Irish Migration, I was so proud to see visitors being roused to dance in one gallery and overcome by emotion in another – knowing that I've helped shape memorable experiences. This is further reinforced by the heart-warming reviews and awards that EPIC has received.

SHAPE skills in wider life

My background in anthropology, archaeology and museum studies supported the development of a wide range of transferable skills and led me to a career that supports lifelong learning. As a result of my studies and the projects I've worked on, I have had the opportunity to take language courses, learn new skills, travel to and live in remarkable places, and engage in experiences that I would not have otherwise known about.

Climbing the branching possibilities

From a philosophy master's to working as a software engineer

Alex Keliris
Senior Software Engineer Consultant, Self-employed

Sectors	Technology ICT
SHAPE education	Philosophy MA, University of Sheffield Philosophy BA, University of Sheffield
SHAPE skills at work	Solving complex problems
	Adaptability and flexibility
	Understanding people

When I tell people I studied philosophy they go 'woah!', but I feel like I won the cosmic lottery. There's been no better time to learn to code and I've been able to apply my passion for deep and logical thinking to a practical and rewarding career.

SHAPE education

I was introduced to philosophy at school through religious studies. I loved how it made me think differently and I enjoyed the challenging philosophical and ethical topics, it was my first real taste of humanities. I chose to study philosophy at university not only because I enjoyed the logical problems, but also because philosophy is so broad, encompassing so many topics.

Throughout my degree I studied many topics: from ethics and the philosophy of epistemology to the philosophy of music and language. It was only through exposure to formal logic that I realised how mathematical it can be. Philosophy forces you to work up from first principles of how even language governs your thought, and then interrogate the true root of a problem. Through essay writing, I built arguments using logic, constantly thinking about cause and effect, and balancing different sides of an argument.

Formal logic was the closest my degree came to coding. It is a strict syntax for thought where there is no tolerance for mistakes. I have found that logic is programming at the foundational level, and the need to break things down into logical steps is a crucial aspect of programming.

I then studied a master's in the philosophy of music, as music is a huge area of passion in life. I got into software development by accident at an internship with a classical sheet music company. The company was modernising many elements of its business at the time — I was allowed to spend some time with the technical team, and I became obsessed with coding. I was teaching myself how to code on the train to and from work, playing around combining music with code. I even tried to create a software start-up but soon I had my first full-time job as a Software Engineer.

SHAPE skills at work

Solving complex problems

More than any specific ability, the main transferable skill has been deep thinking. Often my colleagues look at problems and quickly arrive at solutions but are not always dealing with the underlying issue. By applying logical analysis and digging as deep as constraints allow, I can thoroughly problem-solve. In software, it's important that solutions are future proofed as best as possible, so you try to solve a problem with as much completeness as you can, while maintaining pragmatism and agility for future changes in requirements.

Philosophy also lets you consider trade-offs in a rigorous and systematic way. For example, just in choosing the programming language of a new business system, it may be quick to learn, implement and hire for, and easy to read, but perhaps it is slow to run or permits for less rigour in runtime correctness. Philosophy allows you to consider those benefits and weigh them, always assessing approaches and thinking about repercussions.

Understanding people

Coming to software from the humanities gives you an extra sense of how all software problems are people problems. Human relationships affect even the most purely technical of problems. For example, in an early stage of a 'green field' project with no legacy code, you have the opportunity to get it right first time — thinking about how the business actually works and anticipating its needs. Often, internal politics and lack of shared language can result in complex systems that don't solve the requirements, and I am able to help here.

Flexibility

A background in philosophy helps me to accept unknowns in my work and be agile when situations change. Software engineering doesn't have a blueprint like building a house. You often don't know the next decision you'll face, but you have to make some foundational decisions now. This 'agile' approach is the foundation of software development now as systems need to adjust.

Managing uncertainty is a crucial skill in my work. Businesses have deadlines, need to forecast costs, and like to time when the marketing department can start their work. But making estimates of a software component is notoriously hard. For example, even a payment platform is full of possibilities and uncertainties such as integrating with different banks, and how they may change. Being able to work in this uncertainty — making decisions, balancing demands now and anticipating future needs while working within constraints — is something I have brought with me from my philosophy bachelor's and master's degrees.

Work benefits and satisfaction

I absolutely love my job. I would be coding even if I wasn't working as a software engineer. I never expected to love coding — when I started learning it was purely a means to an end — but the power it gives for adding value to a business or service, as well as in other areas of life, has given me a new major passion. It's well paid, which is a bonus as demand outstrips supply, meaning I can work flexibly.

Above all else, I value the creativity that coding provides. You can take a new idea and build something that didn't exist before, all the while solving some intellectually challenging problems along the way. I find the whole process extremely satisfying.

SHAPE skills in wider life

My background in philosophy serves as a foundation for many of my interests and approaches to life. My study of ethics shapes the way I behave and treat people. I think about the ancient Greek virtues of prudence, justice, courage and temperance, and how I can best fulfil these virtues through my actions. Another example is thinking critically about news and media stories. I constantly apply the same rigour and thinking techniques from philosophy, with the goal of taking a rational and measured approach to potentially new knowledge and information.

Understanding motivations to study SHAPE in higher education

As SHAPE expertise and skills are utilised across the UK economy and positively contribute to our society and culture, we need a better understanding of what motivates students to study them. The higher education sector faces new challenges which demand a more holistic understanding of the decisions made by prospective students alongside where those decisions lead. Why do students decide to study SHAPE disciplines at university? What are their key motivations? And how do *they* understand the value of their degrees? The case studies in this report give voice to such motivations and value.

Within a group as large and heterogeneous as the student population, there is a range of complex decision-making that goes into the choice of university and discipline. In fact, salary outcomes are not a main reason for choosing to study in higher education.[37] A UUK/ComRes student survey asked students about their reasons for studying at university; it found that 56% of students decided to study in higher education because they **found their discipline interesting**, while 50% saw it as the **first step in building a career** and 48% **enjoy learning**. Only 38% of respondents chose their course based on salary outcomes. Similarly, students of SHAPE disciplines were most likely to choose **I find my degree subject interesting**, **I enjoy studying and learning**, **as a first step in building a career**, and **to have new experiences** as reasons for higher education study.[38] These findings are indicative of the diverse reasons for studying at higher education level, regardless of disciplinary choice.

37 ComRes interviewed 2,280 people online between 20 August and 2 September 2019: 767 undergraduate students and 1,513 people who graduated in the last 5-10 years. UUK and Comres, *Students and Recent Graduates*, pp. 1-9.

38 Kernohan, D. (2019), 'Is University Choice Really All about the Money? The UUK/ComRes Student Poll', *WonkHE*, [13 June 2022].

These findings resonate with the case studies in this report, with participants discussing their love and passion for their chosen degree as well as the depth of their interest in the discipline. From a passion for Shakespeare and novels leading to the pursuit of an English degree and a career as a neurodiversity trainer, to a love of museums as a grounding factor for the study of archaeology and a career in content design, our case study participants were often motivated to study SHAPE disciplines because of a **life-long passion**.

> *"Long before A-levels and degree choices, I was passionate about English, and an avid reader of Shakespeare and novels".*
>
> Neurodiversity Consultant and Trainer

Our case study participants also value the breadth of perspectives that SHAPE disciplines offer. Some participants chose their course because they valued the breadth of the discipline, which allowed them 'to follow a great range of topics' (Content Designer), while others 'didn't want to narrow down' their options (Senior Data Journalist). Our participants valued the breadth of insights and approaches to SHAPE disciplines, which many feel has given them a greater **flexibility** in their career choices. Indeed, one participant also noted that they chose to study English Literature because the subject would expand their career options, allowing them to pursue a career that would enable them to do something 'important' and make 'a difference' (Senior Data Journalist).

Participants discussed how their attitude to wider life, beyond both work and higher education, impacted their decision to study SHAPE degrees. Many discuss their desire to remain **intellectually curious**, and flag that, in turn, their SHAPE expertise and transferable skills support lifelong learning (Product Lead, Android Machine Learning and Chief Sustainability Officer), cultural exchange (Vice Chairman, Managing Partner), commitment to the wider community (Community Engagement Officer) and critical engagement with current affairs (Business Manager and Event Manager).

Though the case study dataset is small, and therefore not fully representative of the diversity of student decisions and experiences, the discussions add depth to research findings that indicate that students are not only thinking about salary when they make the decision to study a discipline. Instead, there are also wider motivations, including **passion** for the discipline, **ambition** to make a positive difference, and an **intellectual curiosity** about different societies and perspectives.

Conclusions

The case studies showcased in this report offer an in-depth exploration of the breadth of expertise and skills cultivated and offered by SHAPE graduates. Our participants give voice to the importance of skills in examining, explaining, and changing human behaviour, as well as understanding and learning from the past in order to prepare for a rapidly changing world.

As a collective, these case studies also demonstrate the diversity of SHAPE disciplines, and how such core skills nurtured are used and valued across the UK economy, including high-growth sectors and industries. Building upon a love of learning in higher education settings can enable individuals to pursue a range of careers in diverse sectors. Indeed, our case studies illustrate how a grounding in a SHAPE degree enables individuals pursue further technical training and qualifications. SHAPE disciplines positively develop core skills and behaviours that are increasingly important and valuable to businesses across multiple sectors, including flexibility, creativity and problem solving.

Our sample case studies also put faces and voices to statistics that evidence the importance of SHAPE skills to the UK economy. They provide an in-depth discussion of graduate success and demonstrate the strength and vitality of SHAPE graduates. Our case study participants enjoy exciting, rewarding, and flexible careers grounded in their SHAPE skills. This report showcases how those with SHAPE backgrounds are active in valuable and relevant roles in challenging environments, contributing to key sectors, economic growth, and the national recovery from COVID-19.

Our collection of voices here can be utilised by students thinking through their discipline choices for higher education, as well as teachers advising young people on higher education. This report can also be utilised by policymakers as in-depth, illustrative examples of how SHAPE graduates utilise their degrees in successful careers that span diverse sectors across the UK economy.

The previous reports from the British Academy Skills Programme identify the core skillset gained from the study of SHAPE disciplines and evidence the strong demand for SHAPE skills across the UK economy. The addition of this final report adds in-depth insight into the experiences of SHAPE graduates who are utilising their skills across a variety of sectors and roles. The Skills Programme has brought to life the vital skillset developed by SHAPE graduates, demonstrating that they not only contribute to the economy, but also to the enrichment of our culture and society. We hope the evidence that has emerged from our Skills Programme will continue to foster understandings of the diversity and relevance of SHAPE expertise and skills in an evolving and uncertain economy and society.

References

Bakhshi, H., Schneider, P. (2017), *The Future of Skills: Employment in 2030*, Nesta and Pearson.

Civil Service HR (2018), *Civil Service Fast Stream: Annual Report 2017 and 2018*.

Hedges, S., Meiskem D., Battiston, A., Conlon, G. (2019), *Understanding the Career Paths of AHSS Graduates in the UK and Their Contribution to the Economy*, London Economics and The British Academy.

Kavanaugh, J., Kumar, R. (2019), 'How to Develop a Talent Pipeline for your Digital Transformation', *Harvard Business Review*, [5 Aug 22].

Kernohan, D. (2019), 'Is University Choice Really All about the Money? The UUK/ComRes Student Poll', *WonkHE*, [13 June 2022].

Kingston University London and YouGov (2022), *Future Skills: League Table 2022*.

Office for National Statistics (n.date), 'UK Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) Hierarchy', *ONS Digital*, [25 Aug 22].

Rowan, A., Neves J. (2021), *2021 UK Engagement Survey*, AdvanceHE.

Studee (Dec, 2019), 'MPs and their degrees: here's where and what our UK politicians studied', [13 June 22].

Taylor, A., Nelson, J., O'Donnell, S., Davies, E., and Hillary, J. (2022). *The Skills Imperative 2035: What Does the Literature Tell Us about Essential Skills Most Needed for Work?*, NFER and Nuffield Foundation.

The British Academy (2020), *Qualified for the Future: Quantifying demand for arts, humanities and social science skills*.

The British Academy (2017), *The Right Skills: Celebrating skills in the arts, humanities and social sciences*.

The British Academy, 'This is SHAPE', [25 Aug 22].

UUK and Comres (Sept 2019), *Universities UK – Students and Recent Graduates Research – September 2019*.

Appendix

Illustrative list of SHAPE subjects (Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy/Environment) (from REF 2021).

Geography and Environmental Studies	Modern Languages and Linguistics
Archaeology	English Language and Literature
Economics and Econometrics	Classics
Business and Management Studies	Philosophy
Law	Theology and Religious Studies
Politics and International Studies	Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory
Social Work and Social Policy	Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies
Sociology	Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management
Anthropology and Development Studies	History
Education	Area Studies

HESA licensing statement

About the British Academy Skills Programme

The British Academy Skills Programme is a research and policy programme which identifies the skills inherent to the study of SHAPE disciplines (Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy),[39] and demonstrates their value to individuals, society and the economy.

The term 'skills' is widely used in everyday life, political discourse and in educational contexts, often interchangeably with words such as 'competence' and 'attribute'. For this programme, we have adopted a broad understanding of 'skills' which goes beyond 'abilities' to include knowledge, attitudes and behaviours.

The first report from the Skills Programme, ***The Right Skills: Celebrating skills in the arts, humanities and social sciences***, was published November 2017.[40] The report presented the core set of skills gained from the study of SHAPE disciplines, exploring the contributions that SHAPE graduates make in the workforce and to wider society. It recommended a series of actions to ensure that the skills gained in the pursuit of SHAPE disciplines are protected and recognised for the essential role they play in future prosperity.

Qualified for the Future: quantifying demand for arts, humanities and social science skills was published May 2020.[41] Using quantitative evidence to show the strong demand for SHAPE skills, this report demonstrated how graduates with these skills are employed in a wide range of high-growth industries, and can move between roles as a result of the flexible and transferable nature of the skills they have. The report also presented evidence that SHAPE skills and competencies will be relevant as the economy rapidly evolves, and that those with backgrounds in SHAPE disciplines are resilient against economic shocks such as the 2008 financial crisis or the COVID-19 pandemic.

The third report, ***SHAPE Skills at Work: Cast studies from graduates of the social sciences, humanities and arts***, published in 2022, builds on the previous work in the skills programme by highlighting the ways in which SHAPE skills are at work across the UK economy and society. This report gives voice to the findings of *The Right Skills* and *Qualified for the Future* by utilising real life experiences of SHAPE skills in the workplace. From the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic to Android machine learning and net-zero, these case studies offer an in-depth exploration of how SHAPE skills are working for people and the economy.

39 The British Academy. 'This is SHAPE'.
40 The British Academy, *The Right Skills*.
41 The British Academy, *Qualified for the Future*.

The British Academy
10–11 Carlton House Terrace,
London SW1Y 5AH

thebritishacademy.ac.uk
Registered charity no. 233176

Published November 2022

doi.org/10.5871/skills/shape-skills-at-work

Design by Only

The British Academy was established by Royal Charter in 1902. Its purpose is to deepen understanding of people, societies and cultures, enabling everyone to learn, progress and prosper. The Academy inspires, supports and promotes outstanding achievement and global advances in the humanities and social sciences. We are a fellowship of over 1000 of the most outstanding academics and an international community of leading experts focused on people, culture and societies. We are the voice for the humanities and social sciences. We use insights from the past and the present to help shape the future, by influencing policy and affecting change in the UK and overseas.

The British Academy