



University  
of Glasgow



# Humanities World-Changers Report

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The Impact of Glasgow Humanities Degrees  
on our Graduates' Lives and Work

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**March 2026**

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We are  
World-Changing  
Glasgow.

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# Introduction

**By Ian Forrest, Head of the School of Humanities**

In 2026 the University of Glasgow celebrates its 575<sup>th</sup> birthday. We are a proud civic institution with the mission to be a university ‘for the world’. While the subjects taught in the School of Humanities – Archaeology, Celtic and Gaelic, Classics, History, Information Studies and Philosophy – have roots in the curriculum of 1451, they today help students find their place in a changing world and prepare them to lead society’s responses to global challenges. The crucible for this is our thriving academic community made up of students from across the world, from all around the UK, and from every part of Scottish society. We’re deeply proud of them all.

We commissioned this report because the political climate in which universities operate can sometimes be hostile to the Humanities. The national ‘Graduate Outcomes Survey’ measures our students’ rates of employment and salary bands a mere fifteen months after they have graduated. This feels reductive. A Humanities degree is for life (in every sense!) and we wanted to know more about how our students had fared across the years and decades. The Humanities World Changers Report, written by current student Jodie Pike, tells that rich and fascinating story. We hope it will be of interest to our partners in secondary education, civil society, industry, and the arts. And perhaps it will open a window through which our current students can glimpse more of the future that awaits them.

At the University of Glasgow we aspire to be World Changers, and the Humanities World Changers Report demonstrates what this means in the lives of our graduates. They make vital contributions to global affairs, professions of every stripe, culture and creativity, and they have a strong ethos of public service. But the world of the self, the infinite galaxies of the human mind, also bear the imprint of experiences gained and discoveries made during the lectures, long library hours, and the friendship-building days of studying for a Humanities degree at Glasgow.

The Humanities World Changers Report reveals the long-term value of a degree in the Humanities.

# Executive Summary

The key findings of this report highlight the value of Humanities degrees, as reported by University of Glasgow alumni, across three areas: Employment, Skills and Global Citizenship.

## Employment

- **Versatility:** Humanities graduates have the flexibility to move across a wide range of career sectors, supported by the adaptable skills they develop throughout their studies, with alumni reporting careers across 24 different sectors.
- **Professional Success:** Humanities degrees often lead to long-term professional success, with 88.1% of alumni reporting an upward career trajectory, and 90% stating their job position to be Mid-Level, Senior, or Executive.
- **Fulfilment:** Our alumni report high levels of personal fulfilment in their careers, with 91.7% saying they have found meaningful employment in both their current and most recent roles.

## Skills

- **Skills Development:** Humanities graduates develop numerous transferable skills, including written and verbal communication skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, analytical skills, independent thinking, curiosity, open-mindedness and self-reflection. A large majority (77.4% of respondents) identify transferable skills as a key benefit of their studies.
- **Applicability beyond Employment:** These skills are useful to graduates beyond their professional career, facilitating engagement in activities such as further study, training, research, freelancing, self-employment, running a business, volunteering, caring or developing a portfolio.
- **Personal Growth:** 67.9% of respondents report that studying the Humanities has had a transformative impact on their personal development and values.

## Global Citizenship

- **Societal Benefits:** 86.9% of respondents feel their degree has helped them to make a full contribution to society, with alumni developing ethical and social awareness and open-mindedness as defining attributes, enabling them to understand diverse perspectives.
- **Empowerment:** Alumni report empowerment because of their Humanities degrees. Taken together, these findings demonstrate how our alumni become active, thoughtful global citizens: in short, Humanities World Changers.

# Methodology

The findings of this report are based on a survey undertaken in 2025 of alumni who graduated from the University of Glasgow with Humanities degrees between 1971 and 2025. The survey was designed to capture the diverse ways in which our degrees have impacted our graduates' lives and work over the longer term. Respondents were therefore asked questions relating to their career trajectory and salary, and to reflect on how the skills, knowledge and experience they gained during their degree had informed their professional lives. However, they were also asked about their life journey, and how their degree had shaped their ethics, sense of self, worldview and their lives beyond work.

The aim of this approach was to provide an alternative, broader and longitudinal metric to supplement the narrower parameters of the Graduate Outcomes Survey. This UK-wide survey collects data on graduates just 15 months after graduation, focusing on current employment status, salary and the degree to which skills and knowledge learned during their degree are being utilised. The wider parameters of our alumni survey allow meaningful conclusions to be drawn concerning the longer-term and broader impacts of our Humanities degrees.

The survey analysis is presented in two, distinct forms. Quantitative data illuminates a number of key characteristics of the cohort and identifies important trends across the dataset. This is supplemented by qualitative data, including direct quotations from alumni, which adds a vital, contextualised consideration of the human element and of lived experiences. These two forms of data are placed in conversation with, and informed by, recent research on the value of Humanities degrees in the UK more broadly.

# Acknowledgements

This study has been commissioned by the School of Humanities at the University of Glasgow. It is based on an alumni survey conducted by Lauren Durward, Alumni Engagement Coordinator in the College of Arts and Humanities. We are extremely grateful to her for all her work. Further support was provided by colleagues in Careers & Employability, External Relations and Marketing & Communications. Finally, we would like to thank all our alumni who took the time to participate in the survey and who provided such rich and insightful responses.

# 1. Employment

In recent years, UK national bodies including the British Academy and the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) have published research assessing the value to employers of Humanities, Arts and Social Science degrees. This research has indicated that graduates from these degrees remain highly desirable to employers, with their knowledge, skills and experience relevant in a wide range of sectors.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, their predictions for the UK economy anticipate that such graduates will be highly employable within key growth industries, such as Information and Communication, Finance and Insurance, and Administration and Support, possessing the skills to meet anticipated workforce gaps.<sup>2</sup> 8 out of the 10 fastest growing sectors have a higher rate of employment for Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences graduates than those from other disciplines.<sup>3</sup>

This research has also challenged the common assumption of Humanities degrees as having a low earning potential. The pay gap between undergraduate Humanities and STEM graduates has been decreasing in recent years, with postgraduate Humanities and Social Science students overtaking STEM graduates' gross hourly pay in 2017.<sup>4</sup> Strong wage growth in Humanities graduates is also clearly discernible over a 10-year period after graduation.<sup>5</sup> Several of these findings are replicated in the analysis of the Glasgow alumni survey data.

## 1.1 Versatility

The alumni data supports the assertion that a Humanities degree from the University of Glasgow prepares graduates for a diverse range of careers. No single sector dominates the careers reported by the respondents. 25% reported working in the Public sector and government, 17.9% in Academic research and higher education and 11.9% in Creative arts and cultures; however, beyond these three groupings, 21 other industries are reported amongst the remaining 38 respondents (see Figure 1).

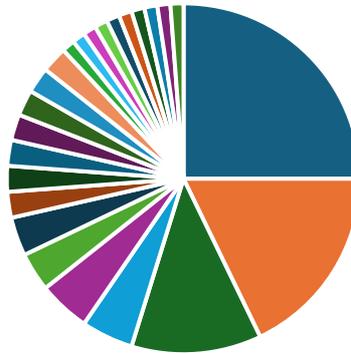
One former graduate recalls:

*"I've moved from private, to voluntary, to public sectors roles with increasing responsibility and authority"*

Anonymous

This reflects the versatility of a Humanities degree, with graduates able to adapt and move between sectors, within an upward trend of career progression. Given the highly changeable nature of the current employment landscape globally, including the advance of AI, the ability to adapt to shifting employer demands is more pertinent than ever.

## Employment by Sector from School of Humanities Alumni Survey



- |   |   |
|---|---|
| ■ Public sector and government            | ■ Academic research and higher education  |
| ■ Creative arts and culture               | ■ Charity                                 |
| ■ Law enforcement, security, intelligence | ■ Teaching and education                  |
| ■ Administrative                          | ■ IT and technology                       |
| ■ Healthcare                              | ■ Financial services and insurance        |
| ■ Media, journalism and publishing        | ■ Hospitality, leisure and travel         |
| ■ Public service and social work          | ■ Marketing, advertising, and PR          |
| ■ Translation services                    | ■ Science and research                    |
| ■ Management and business                 | ■ Investment banking and investment       |
| ■ HR and recruitment                      | ■ Sales                                   |
| ■ Property                                | ■ Environment services and sustainability |
| ■ Engineering                             | ■ Social and market research              |

Figure 1

Comparatively, Humanities students appear to take longer deciding on their career journey than students from other disciplines. Analysis of the University of Glasgow career readiness data from 2024-25 shows that First Year Humanities students are less likely to be thinking about careers, and Fourth Year Humanities students are less likely to be actively applying for jobs than the University average. Work is now being done at Glasgow to address this, by offering current students more experiential learning and work-related opportunities in the curriculum from Year 1 onwards, meaning they will have far more confidence in their disciplinary and transferable skills going into the labour market as graduates. Nonetheless, to some extent this hesitation is understandable when considering the vast range of options open to these students; a wider range of possibilities may require more thought and initial delays in career progression. This versatility and opportunity for a wide range of professional applications is less pronounced in STEM and vocational degrees, in which career options appear more restricted.

This versatility also allows alumni to adapt their career journeys throughout their lives. This is reflected in various alumni responses, one respondent stating:

*"I have progressed in seniority and gained a breadth of experience quickly, having worked in roles across organisational development, grant administration and scrutiny, employability and skills, project management, and compliance and monitoring. I have worked for a few different local authorities in order to find the niche that I want to explore further for my career and plan on gaining more experience in public policy."*

Anonymous

Having the freedom to explore different sectors and delay specialising until experienced in a number of roles is a key advantage of Humanities degrees and should be acknowledged as such. The more impatient or eager graduates may want to secure their life-long career immediately, but, clearly, many others see career progression as a journey, not a race.

### 1.2. Professional Success

An upward trend in professional success is also detectable within the survey data. Over 90% of our Humanities graduate respondents report their job position being Mid-Level, Senior, or Executive (see Figure 2). This would suggest that reaching higher-level positions is extremely common amongst alumni. Furthermore, 88.1% of alumni report an upward career trajectory. 73.8% of alumni respondents believe that their employers value their Humanities degrees.

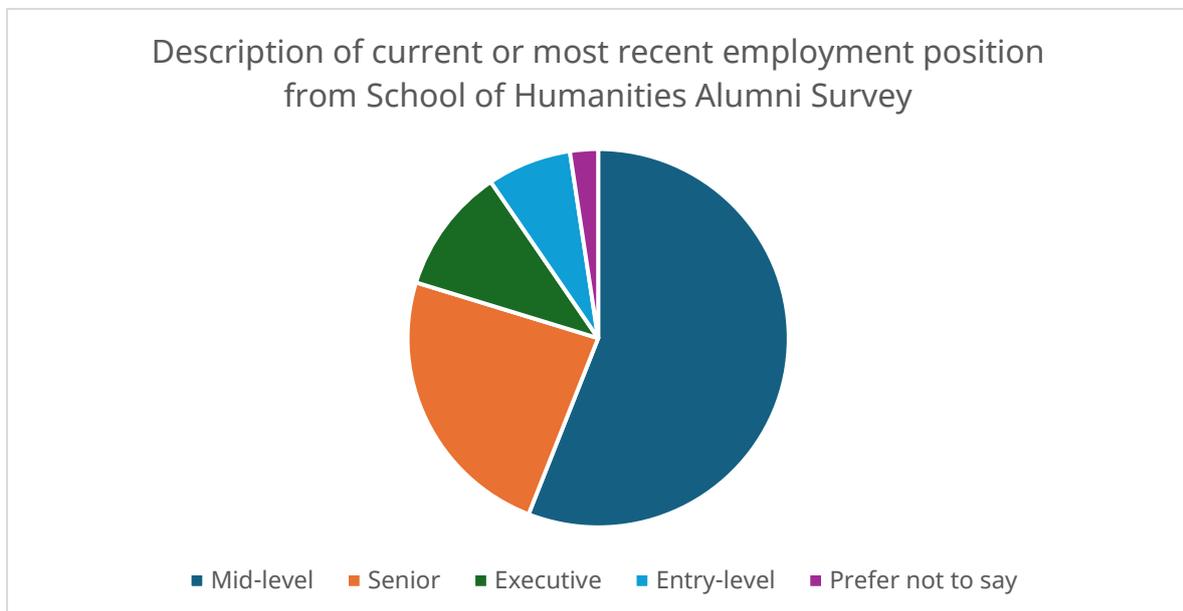


Figure 2

The UK-wide Graduate Outcome Survey results from 2022-23 suggest the employment of only 58% of Humanities graduates in professional-level roles, in comparison to 71.9% across all subjects, with average earnings sitting just below the all-graduate average.<sup>6</sup> The previously referenced career readiness data does indicate initial uncertainty in career development that could align with this reported underperformance. However, it is important to consider that our alumni survey provides a perspective from a range of graduates across their career journeys. Using snapshots of data during and immediately after university to analyse the wider value of Humanities degrees would be misrepresenting their longer-lasting-impact, which this report aims to illuminate.

One alumna writes:

*“My degree has never been questioned or made to feel of less value by an employer. Early in my career when I was just trying to get a foot in the door and jump from fixed-term contract to fixed-term contract, I might’ve questioned the relevance of my degree to my work. However, now that I’m in my permanent “career” position, I am genuinely thankful every week that I did a humanities degree due to the research, analysis and information presentation skills that it has given me.”*

Anonymous

The insights relayed by this respondent support many of the conclusions of this report. Soon after graduation, at the time when the Graduate Outcomes Survey is taken, alumni may find it challenging to reflect meaningfully on the relevance and value of their degree. With a longer perspective, when at a mid or end-career position, the value of a Humanities degree comes into focus.

In qualitative responses alumni link their professional success closely with their university education. One alumnus reflected on their accomplished career, including being awarded an OBE for services to local government in 2003. They wrote:

*“I was the first member of my family to attend University and would never have had a pretty successful career without my Glasgow University degree.”*

Peter Daniels OBE, MA, M.Phil, LLB

### **1.3. Fulfilment**

The survey findings also indicate a high level of professional fulfilment and satisfaction in alumni. 78.6% of respondents reported that their career trajectory has been in line with their aspirations and an overwhelming 91.7% of alumni respondents find their current or most recent employment meaningful. This would indicate an extremely high level of personal fulfilment in relation to the alumni’s careers and professional lives.

The ability to transition between roles, thus allowing alumni more scope to reconsider their aspirations and adjust accordingly, may be linked to this level of fulfilment. The high likelihood of professional success regardless of sector could be a further contributing factor.

One former graduate reports:

*"Being furloughed during Covid changed my perspective and before long I started pursuing a PhD ... As I say though, this was far from linear - I love what I do now and am excited for my future career, but I also worked a range of jobs (including a summer as a landscape gardener!) on my journey to where I am now and where I hope to be going forward."*

Levi Sean Tippett (Researcher, University of Stirling)

Non-linear career direction allows graduates to change and find fulfilment as the job market transforms and as they change and develop in tandem.

## 2. Skills

A wide range of transferable skills are demonstrated by Humanities graduates, with a report by the Warwick Institute for Employment Research suggesting spoken and written communication, time management, independent working and team working as among the most reported.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, research suggests that other, less recognised skills are also valued by employers. A University of Oxford report has underscored how narrative skills and story-craft play a vital role in today's business world.<sup>8</sup> However, their applicability far exceeds the realm of employment, providing benefit to our alumni in many aspects of life.

A 2023 HEPI Report states that “Humanities subjects give students the ability to work in sophisticated ways with language, text and written information that is invaluable for the majority of professions in an information-based economy ... a firm foundation in critical thinking, independent research skills and sophisticated linguistic and textual-information handling, coupled with advanced communication skills, provide an invaluable platform that takes years to develop and cannot be quickly back filled or worked around.”<sup>9</sup> They deem these skills as essential, while specialist technical knowledge can and often is supplied by employers.<sup>10</sup>

### 2.1 Skills Development

The majority of our alumni reported developing the following skills during their degree: written and verbal communication skills, critical thinking and problem-solving, analytical skills, independent thinking, curiosity, open-mindedness and self-reflection. 77.4% of respondents believed the transferable skills they developed were a main benefit of their studies. The most highly reported skill developed amongst our alumni was their analytical abilities, though other skills also ranked highly in our data.

Over the longer term, 95% of Humanities alumni report using the skills and learning from their degree as their careers develop. This is in contrast to the UK-wide Graduate Outcomes Survey, which captures only the first 15 months after graduation and shows that at that very early stage in their career, only 68% of respondents from 2022-23 feel they are using their degree skills.<sup>11</sup> This would suggest that the skills and attributes developed through the study of Humanities at Glasgow become more evident over time.

These skills are incredibly relevant to employment and professional development, and the alumni survey facilitates further reflection on this. The quantitative data reflects many of the qualitative responses, in which alumni recorded developing many beneficial skills:

*“Having a Humanities degree is more transferable in some ways as it shows that level of education with more transferable skills.”*

Anonymous

The Scottish context of the four-year degree is also relevant for consideration. A longer university experience provides more time to develop and refine these skills.

## 2.2 Applicability Beyond Employment

The survey data also suggests that Humanities degrees have further value beyond employment, revealing alumni engagement with other activities. 39% of the alumni in paid employment were also involved in further study, training, research, freelancing, self-employment, running a business, volunteering, caring or developing a portfolio. Indeed, in the Graduate Outcomes Survey, it is striking that the School of Humanities consistently outperforms within the University for 'self-employment', pointing to an enterprising and entrepreneurial mindset. The proportionate engagement with these activities by employed alumni is depicted in Figure 3. The versatile engagement with these activities by employed alumni is depicted in Figure 3. The versatility of a Humanities degree and wide-ranging applicability of the skills developed through the university experience may be a contributing factor in facilitating alumni engagement in so many different spheres.

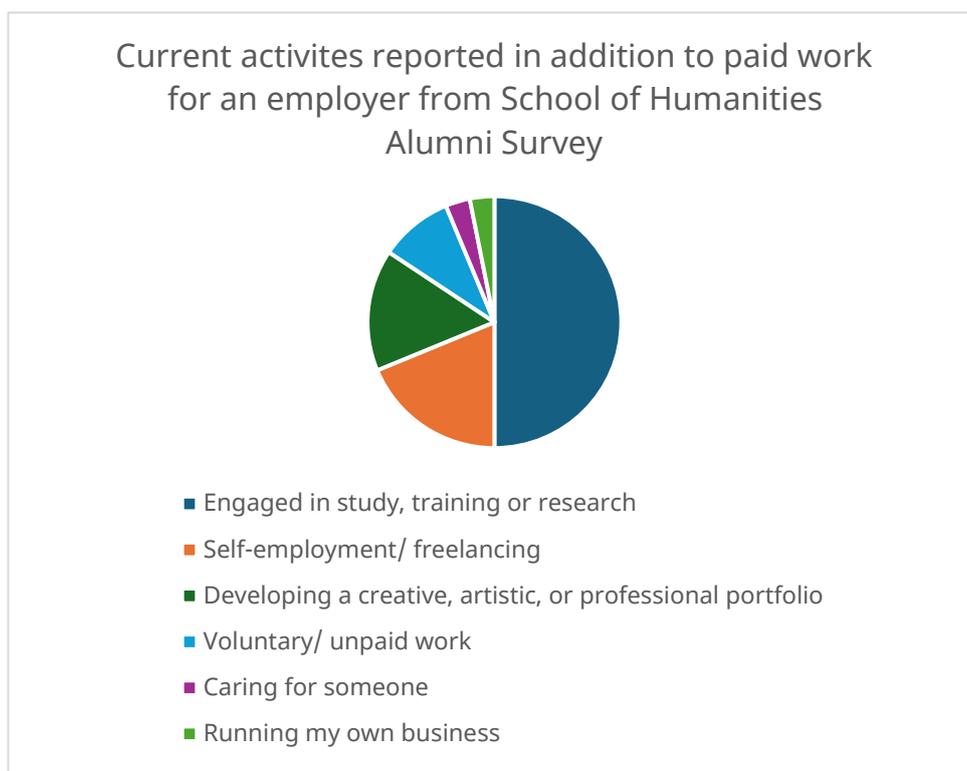


Figure 3

This positive effect was reflected even in the responses of alumna who moved away from the Humanities:

*"My career path may not reflect my studying a Humanities degree but I feel that I gained a wealth of benefits which helped me go on to do further study. It helped me become a more critical thinker which helps me in both my academic and professional life."*

Anonymous

This would suggest that a Humanities degree is a resource that can be drawn on throughout your life, regardless of where your professional career or personal circumstances leads you.

### 2.3 Personal Growth

A common theme in the survey data was how our alumni felt their degrees had contributed to their personal growth. Many of the qualitative responses convey individual self-development through their studies and beyond. This deep impact on individuals and the way it continues to impact them day-to-day is clear in many of the written responses:

*Thinking more about skills, my Humanities degrees at Glasgow validated my love of reading and raised my consciousness about the issues around language and identity, helped me to contextualise my knowledge amongst the great deal that I do not know, introduced me to analytical skills and information science issues that I still use on a daily basis, and encouraged me to take my knowledge from one context and apply it to another."*

Anonymous

The ways in which the respondents have benefitted from these skills are broad and far-reaching. They range from the development of subject-specific knowledge and transferable skills, to becoming more ethically and socially aware. Many of these benefits extend well beyond the workplace. In fact, 67.9% of respondents report that studying the Humanities has had a transformative impact on their personal development and values.

# 3. Global Citizenship

According to a 2019 report by ComRes, a member of the British Polling Council, an average of 80% of UK Humanities students and graduates believe that wider society benefits from people going to university.<sup>12</sup> Further reports suggest a variety of contexts in which Humanities graduates can help wider society. Predictions of future challenges that the UK will face, including technological advancements and political unrest, indicate a need for the attributes that Humanities graduates have, suggesting that “The arts, humanities and social sciences help to build active citizens who can think for themselves and hold authority to account”.<sup>13</sup> In relation to AI and climate change, there is a specific call for the Humanities to provide a human element that technology cannot.<sup>14</sup>

## 3.1 Societal Benefit

Of the alumni respondents, 86.9% feel their degree has helped them to make a full contribution to society, indicating both personal satisfaction and wider benefits to society at large. This suggests broad and lasting impacts of Humanities degrees, beyond their transformative impact on careers, life paths, skills, values and perspectives.

This ability to more fully contribute to society includes an increased ethical and cultural awareness amongst alumni. The quantitative data shows that 49 alumni reported becoming more ethically and socially aware through their studies, which would facilitate further consideration of current issues and concerns in our ever-changing socio-political climate. The ability of the Humanities to connect many alumni to current global issues and increase awareness was another common thread amongst respondents. One respondent wrote:

*“In order to fight encroaching fascism and misinformation, we need people who can: communicate clearly and persuasively, analyse complex information accurately, solve problems creatively, and care about other humans.”*

Anonymous

## 3.2 Empowerment

The qualitative data also reflects the individual empowerment fostered by our Humanities degrees, throughout their time at the University of Glasgow and beyond. Alumni wrote:

*“There is power in learning how to listen and discuss, how to check your sources and recognize your biases.”*

Anonymous

*“Humanities degrees make the kind of people we desperately need in the world right now.”*

Anonymous

This empowerment is coupled with other positive attributes fostered throughout their degrees. The majority of alumni reported developing curiosity, empathy and open-mindedness through their studies. These qualities are all essential to instigating positive societal changes. In particular, 61.9% reported developing open-mindedness, which is essential for engaging with the world with tolerance and care.

The increased confidence to engage with issues of significance was also relayed by one alumna:

*"These may be natural strengths, but they were underdeveloped prior to my studies, which afforded me the direction, inspiration and increasing levels of intellectual freedom to practise reading, writing, speaking and thinking skills and engage with increasing confidence with subjects of cultural, social, artistic and moral significance."*

Anonymous

These qualities all indicate and showcase the potential for University of Glasgow Humanities graduates to tackle significant social issues.

# Conclusions

To conclude, analysis of the University of Glasgow Humanities Alumni Survey reveals the value and importance of our Humanities degrees, personally, professionally, and to the larger world. The qualitative data aligns with the quantitative analysis, together demonstrating the value of the Humanities as relayed by Glasgow alumni.

Analysis has shown how the skills honed by our graduates throughout their studies have transferred into their working lives, allowing them to succeed professionally, find fulfilling work, engage in a range of activities, grow personally and have a positive impact on the wider world.

These positive impacts have a long-lasting effect – not just on careers but also on personal fulfilment at work. This may not be immediately visible upon graduation but becomes increasingly clear over time. The breadth of alumni responses, including graduates from more than five decades ago, was essential in shaping these findings, especially when viewed alongside the short-term perspective offered by the Graduate Outcomes data.

By uncovering the true value of the Humanities, and the power of Humanities graduates to become World Changers, it becomes clear that these subjects deserve to be valued both personally and collectively. In a political and cultural climate where so-called 'low value' degrees are often dismissed, perceptions of the Humanities can shift quickly. Yet the evidence of this report and our alumni show their impact is profound and enduring. Now more than ever we must recognise, defend and celebrate the importance of Humanities degrees and the meaningful skills their graduates bring to the workplace and society as a whole.

# References

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- <sup>4</sup> The British Academy, *Qualified for the Future*, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/skills-qualified-future-quantifying-demand-arts-humanities-social-science/> (May 2020), pp. 15-18.
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- <sup>6</sup> Rachel Beauchamp, 'Humanities Overview', *What Do Graduates Do? 2025/26*, Prospects Luminare (November 2025), p. 59.
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