

# Historical Insights

Focus on Teaching



## Work-related learning in history

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# Introduction: the value of work-related learning in history

Students, parents, employers and lecturers are increasingly interested in work-related issues in the humanities curriculum. For students and their parents, there is an understandable anxiety about career paths: as a history degree is not vocational, there is no obvious career at the end of the three years of study. The vast majority of students will not go into a career that is directly related to their degree. The most popular careers for history graduates include teaching, the civil service and finance. It is important, therefore, that we make explicit the transferable skills and competencies that come with doing a history degree and with undertaking work-related learning. It is also desirable, particularly for those students who would like to work as historians, that we help to widen their understanding of the sorts of 'applied history' jobs that exist in the world of work.

Universities also are very focused on 'employability'. There is evidence to suggest that students who undertake placements obtain higher degree classifications than those who do not<sup>1</sup> and that the world of work has an important role in helping students to develop valuable transferable employability skills and the ability to articulate what their skills are. In response to the August 2010 requirement of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to publish a University Employability Statement, many universities are now prioritising work-related learning. Both Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) and the University of Greenwich, for example, have made a commitment that all students will have (from 2012) the opportunity to undertake work-related learning as part of their degree programme.<sup>2</sup>

Although academics have been traditionally suspicious of the focus on skills and 'employability', often seeing it as a distraction from the love of the subject which motivates many students to take a humanities degree, we are aware of the value of working as historians in an extra-university context. This shift was recognised by the History Benchmark Revision Group in 2007 in its acknowledgement of 'the growing number and importance of learning activities such as fieldwork, community-based projects, work placements and so on'.<sup>3</sup> For some of us, the desire to make links with

- 1 U. Lucas and P. Leng Tan, 'Strand 2 findings: the improvement in academic performance of placement students' in *Developing a reflective capacity within undergraduate education: the role of work-based placement learning* (The Higher Education Academy and Charitable Trusts of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales 2005–07: October 2007), pp. 79–92.
- 2 Greenwich Graduate EDU Briefing Paper no 2, May 2011; Sheffield Hallam University, Faculty of Development and Society, Education for Employability Strategy (e4e), 2010–12, Feb. 2011. Visit [www.gre.ac.uk/emag/greenwichgraduate](http://www.gre.ac.uk/emag/greenwichgraduate) to see the Greenwich Graduate statements and [www.shu.ac.uk/employability/employability-statement.html](http://www.shu.ac.uk/employability/employability-statement.html) for the SHU employability statement.
- 3 Quality and Assurance Agency (QAA), History Benchmark Statement (2007), p. iv.

the wider history community led us into what is now termed ‘work-related learning’ long before it became a buzz word in universities.

Some anxieties remain — not least about the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) data, which tracks student employment six months after they graduate, and which is being used to compare and judge us. It remains the case that most humanities graduates are not on their long-term career path this soon after finishing their degrees. It is also probably true that a focus on employability will not change graduate job opportunities for first-generation university students in northern cities suffering effects of the economic recession. It might be a worry therefore that we will fail to deliver in terms of improved destination data because poor employment rates for our students are issues out of our hands.

According to the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR), average applications per job have risen to 83 in 2011, from 69 in 2010, 49 in 2009 and 31 in 2008. There are now more graduates chasing the vacancies than in the past, both in terms of those leaving university and those from recent years who are ‘still trying to get a toehold on the career ladder’.<sup>4</sup>

Whilst individual students undoubtedly benefit from CV preparation and managing a work-related project, doing such work *as history*, rather than as a bolt-on skills module, often enhances their experience of their history degree. Numerous students who have taken the Family and Community History modules over the years at both Greenwich and SHU have reported it is the best thing they have done; some have even described it as life-changing! Work-related learning in history can tap into a student’s passion for public history, offering them a welcome challenge to see the relevance of what we do in the ‘real world’. External examiners have also been consistently impressed with the high standards such courses allow students to achieve.

The application of the historian’s knowledge and skills in the world outside of the university also provides critical skills which are of benefit to their work on the wider degree and which can help students (and academics alike) to develop a new understanding of our subject. We suggest that ‘employability’ can be about *more* than skills for employment. As Helen Day has written in relation to the English curriculum, ‘work-related learning offers a variety of inter and extra-curricular opportunities that enable students to enhance their employability whilst developing a further understanding of the theories of their subject through the practical and industry

4 Graduate jobs “rise despite record applicants per post”. Available at [www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-13934518](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-13934518) (accessed 28 June 2011).

applications of their discipline.<sup>5</sup> What is more, these can be embedded within the subject without compromising academic integrity and can be pursued in a lively and engaging way which makes connections with the wider public interest in history.

## Different models of work-related learning

This booklet is concerned with work-related learning in history. In the first instance, we wish to make a distinction between *work-related* and *work-based* learning. *Work-related* learning can include a range of activities, including projects commissioned by external groups, work simulations, visits and field trips, career management activities, visits by external speakers and learning that takes place in a workplace. *Work-based* learning is therefore a sub-section of work-related learning, and the two should not be conflated.

Work-related learning is a growth area within the curriculum, as universities strive to extend learning opportunities. These may include:

- the sandwich work experience, where students typically spend one or two semesters with an external company or organisation
- the integrated block practice placement where the student may also be a trainee or employee, such as teaching, nursing, social work, foundation degree
- the employment-based learning programme, where student is in a work environment for most of the programme
- short work-related experience, ‘work sampling’ and internships in the region and university
- the development of employability skills outside of credit-bearing modules, in particular ‘soft skills’, through volunteering or participating in a University ‘Ambassador Scheme’
- linking study to a workplace in which the student is already employed (e.g. on a part-time basis) or involved with extra-curricular activities
- simulated work-related projects
- enterprise-related, practical work-based or externally set projects in collaboration with (and sometimes commissioned by) employment sectors.

The last of these, often in the context of a stand-alone module, in which extensive academic support in terms of lectures and seminars is provided, is becoming the most usual for history students.

5 H. Day, *Work-Related Learning in English Studies: A Good Practice Guide* (English Subject Centre, Report Series, No. 20, Feb. 2010), p. 27.

# Teaching a work-related learning module

What follows is an example of a two-semester, 40-credit module, which is divided into three blocks: the academic preparation in university, the work-related project and careers management.

## Block A: The taught part

The module opens with a six-week lecture and seminar programme, which includes lectures by academic historians and people working in the public history field: archivists, museum and heritage professionals, school teachers, journalists and health workers.

The following sections suggest areas that can be taught effectively to enhance academic study and provide streams for work-related learning projects.

### History and heritage

Recent decades have seen an exponential growth of interest in history outside of universities. Museums, historical fiction, battlefields, archaeological sites, industrial renovations, listed buildings, National Trust and English Heritage buildings and sites, memorials, libraries and community history websites are visited, read and talked about, as never before. Television programmes such as 'Restoration', 'Who Do You Think You Are?' and 'Long Lost Family' have seen immense popularity, and the emergence of the celebrity historian, in the form of Simon Schama and David Starkey, has reinforced the trend. The focus of the Heritage Lottery Fund and the establishment of government departments and the range of agencies and initiatives concerned, for example, with Heritage Coasts and National Parks, have ensured that heritage and history are very much concerns at the centre of our culture.

It sometimes seems that the 'heritage debates' — exemplified by the exchanges in the 1980s and early 1990s by Robert Hewison, Raphael Samuel and others (see below) — are a little tired now that we have moved on to a more sophisticated and less polarised understanding of the relationship between heritage and history. At the same time, it is not uncommon to come up against attitudes among academic historians which do indeed uncritically replicate the assumption that heritage is not 'real' history. Even those of us who are enthusiastic about public history are often alarmed by Schama et al., whose presentations tend to obscure the historical process in favour of a neat narrative. On the other hand, it remains the case that many public historians view academic history as unhelpfully elitist, inaccessible and cut off from the real world. It is useful for students to engage with these debates, as they have the potential to encourage a more critical approach to their own practice.

Students often enjoy polemic and the engagement with the wider moral vision that it seeks to provoke. Robert Hewison's *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (1987), was inspired by the revelation that, just as manufacturing industries disappeared, a museum opened every week in Britain. 'The heritage industry is an attempt to dispel this climate of decline by exploiting the economic potential of our culture,' Hewison wrote, 'and it finds a ready market because the perception of decline includes all sorts of insecurities and doubts that makes its produce especially attractive and reassuring'. While individually this is all fine, collectively it amounts to 'a country obsessed with its past, unable to face its future'.<sup>6</sup> When heritage attractions are seen by local authorities as a commercial opportunity, and museums 'become one of Britain's new growth industries,' Hewison continued, 'they are not signs of vitality, but symbols of national decline.'<sup>7</sup> Moreover, Hewison and others have argued that the product they develop is shallow and packaged, resembling nostalgia more than history. Thus, from this perspective, having people dressed in period costume — as at Ironbridge or Beamish, for example — prioritises entertainment over authenticity. Places such as Big Pit in Gwent, where unemployed miners act out their previous employed roles, are the mark of a 'sick society', to use Hewison's term, when, worried by the future, we are obsessed with an idealised version of the past.

For students in a city such as Sheffield, where very little manufacturing industry remains, this argument resonates. But Raphael Samuel's response often unexpectedly engages them at an emotional level. In 'Heritage-baiting' (1996), Samuel dismisses accusations from academics that heritage 'disneyfies' history. This, he says, is academic snobbery, the articulation of a belief that the only true history is that which can be found in history books; the result of social condescension and an assumption that heritage encourages sentimentalism rather than critical thinking. Samuel asserts that the very popularity of heritage with the public is worth exploring. Indeed, it has its own history: people flock to historic towns or monuments today in a similar way to how Victorians visited sites of 'improvement'.

Students often discover they have very strong feelings about the issues relating to the question of 'whose history?', whether that is in terms of the sorts of history that should be studied in university curricula or displayed in a public history environment; whether professional historians alone have the authority to interpret historical phenomena; about appealing to a wider audience and utilising a range of methods to encourage interest. For example, they often find that they are quite passionate in their belief that museums — traditionally associated with the elite in the 18th, and in the 19th centuries grudgingly opened to the poor in an 'improving' capacity — continue to try to extend their appeal to hitherto unrepresented groups. National

6 R. Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (London, 1987), pp. 8–9.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 84.

museums and galleries became free in December 2001, and in 2009–10 8.6 million children visited museums, which accounted for 20 per cent of the national figure.<sup>8</sup> The question of ‘whose heritage?’ also underlines the fact that heritage, like history, requires interpretation. Brisbane and Woods use the example of a human skeleton stored in a museum. To an archaeologist, it is a skeleton from a 16th-century grave mound; to a bone specialist, it is someone who suffered from arthritis; to a Native American, it is an ancestor who needs to be returned to homeland and re-buried.<sup>9</sup> There are, of course, many heritages within the UK, including English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish heritage; British-Caribbean heritage or South Asian heritage, and those pertaining to the aristocracy or to the industrial working-class, and so on. That these are valued by different people, and are sometimes at odds with each other, requires an understanding of history as complex and contested. Thus, Harewood House, a country house near Leeds, which has recently made more explicit the origins of the Lascelles family’s wealth in the slave trade, challenges the traditional view and places the history of the landed in Britain in a global context of slavery and colonialism.

The question of ‘whose heritage?’ also enables critical discussion of approaches to history and museum practice. There are many developments from the Hewison-Samuel debate that could be discussed here. To take one example: the Australian historian Lucy Taksa, in her illuminating studies of the Eveleigh Railway Workshops outside Sydney and the STEAM museum near Swindon, has shown how ‘heritage management’ is sometimes at odds with an inclusive social history. An over-riding focus on the preservation of engines, described by Taksa as an example of ‘object fetishism’, often obscures social history, such as the agitation which led to improved conditions, for example, or the complex role of women in the railway industry.<sup>10</sup> Taksa argues that, while an interest in history is often ‘a response by a community to the collapse of its manufacturing base’ and may be ‘part of an attempt to transform a redundant industrial landscape into a marketable historical commodity’, we should not underestimate its significance in fostering an ‘emotional link’ with the past that can provide people with ‘meaning, purpose and value’, especially in the context of the economic decline of post-industrial communities.<sup>11</sup>

Consideration of these issues enables critical thinking about public history practice, in terms of the politics of representation, questions of audience and different methods of engagement, about which there is a voluminous literature.

8 ‘Annual Performance Indicators’, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, available at [www.culture.gov.uk/what\\_we\\_do/museums\\_and\\_galleries/6423.aspx](http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/museums_and_galleries/6423.aspx)

9 M. Brisbane and J. Wood (eds.), *A Future for our Past? An Introduction to Heritage Studies* (London, 1996)

10 L. Taksa, ‘Machines and ghosts: politics, industrial heritage and the history of working life at the Eveleigh Workshops’, *Labour History* 85 (2003), 65–88

11 L. Taksa, ‘“Hauling an infinite freight of mental imagery”: finding Labour’s heritage at the Swindon Railway Workshops STEAM museum’, *Labour History Review* 68 (3) (2003), 391–410

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## Community history

The term 'community history' refers to the new phenomenon of popular history research and writing that is being undertaken in towns, villages and cities throughout Britain, and which has been inspired by the accessibility of information on the internet, 'regeneration' initiatives in deprived areas, and the popularity of television history programmes such as 'Restoration' and 'Who Do You Think You Are?'.

Community history has academic origins in social history, particularly of the people's history/'history from below' variety, that has since the 1960s and 1970s come to encompass not only working-class but also black and women's history.

Community history has also received its greatest impetus from outside of universities, however, particularly in the fields of family and local history. By far the most popular of these is family history. It enjoyed a huge growth in the years following the Second World War, further enhanced by technological developments from the early 1980s which saw the availability on microfiche of the 1881 Census for England, Scotland and Wales and the greater accessibility of the data used by the Church of Jesus Christ and Latter-day Saints. At its best, family history moves beyond the lists of names and dates of births, deaths and marriages, to explore the historical context, and can draw creatively on other disciplines, such as anthropology and life writing.

Community history is also shaped by the 'local history' tradition. The latter has not always enjoyed a high reputation with academic history, on account of work which is seen as insufficiently rigorous in method and lacking in contextualisation. It is often criticised for being parochial; a set of stories with little reference to a broader national history. At the same time, local history research is often very creative, integrating different branches of the subject, such as landscape history, social and cultural history, archaeology, folklore and the study of historic buildings.<sup>12</sup> It is also immensely popular, partly due to its ability to inspire a sense of belonging and identity and a pride in place. The issues raised in the debates about the relationship between national history and those of the 'little places' have been addressed in more recent interest in explorations of the connectedness of local and global histories.

The last few years have seen the development of a 'new local history', which has often formed part of wider regeneration projects in deprived areas. 'Regeneration' has been a dominant term in urban planning since the 1980s, its focus on 'urban rebirth and sustainable self-renewal' offering a more radical vision of an integrated approach to economic, social/community and environmental aspects of urban change, than the more top-down, slum clearance 'redevelopment' and 'renewal' programmes of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>13</sup> The practice of history is seen to have 'capacity building' potential, that is, an ability to draw people in, to develop commitment, confidence and skills, encouraging 'community cohesion' and involvement in decision-making about the bigger issues facing the community. From 1997–2010 especially, with the emphasis of New Labour on local democracy and 'active citizenship', various funding streams (including, for example, the Social Exclusion Unit, Round Four of the Single Regeneration Budget, Local Strategic Partnerships, Action Zones, and New Deal for Communities) have included history projects in their programmes. My own small-scale research into the value of community history for its participants suggests that,

<sup>12</sup> W.G. Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape* (London, 1955); see J. Beckett, *Writing Local History* (Manchester, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> R. Furbey, 'Urban regeneration: reflections on a metaphor', *Critical Social Policy* 19 (1999), pp. 419, 422.

even if they do not go on to become leading lights in the wider regeneration initiative, people gain pride though seeing their personal experiences validated and enjoy the newly-forged inter-generational relationships which contribute to community cohesion.<sup>14</sup>

Community history might include:

- local people producing books and pamphlets on the histories of the locality
- heritage events, treasure days and carnivals
- recording oral history interviews
- collecting artefacts, archiving material and creating displays
- collaboration with school teachers on resource packs which tie in with local history in the National Curriculum
- vocational training opportunities: for example, in interviewing or archiving
- a website and, sometimes, an end-of-project book

Two examples, both drawn from the Sheffield area:



A most impressive community history project can be found at Kiveton Park and Wales, a former mining village on the eastern edge of Sheffield which had experienced devastation since the strike of 1984–5, with the closure of the pit in 1994–5 and a steelworks in 1996. A broader regeneration programme sought to address unemployment and consequent social problems, which included increased crime, drugs use and psychological problems. The community-based oral history and archive project received Heritage Lottery funding and employed

a community history project worker, based in the 19th-century colliery offices, for 16 months from September 2006 to Christmas 2007. Local historians developed a photo archive and an oral history archive (with copies going to the National Coal Mining Museum and Rotherham Archives), wrote pamphlets about aspects of local history, produced a schools resource pack to tie in with the Local History unit in the National Curriculum, and produced a website and book. The Kiveton and Wales Local History Society continues the good work as can be seen at [www.kivetonwaleshistory.co.uk](http://www.kivetonwaleshistory.co.uk).

14 A. Twells, 'Remembering for the future: community history and neighbourhood regeneration' (unpublished paper, 2008).

Burngreave Voices was a similar project in a very different part of Sheffield. Funded jointly by Museums Sheffield and Burngreave New Deal for Communities, this community heritage project aimed to celebrate the history of Burngreave and Pitsmoor, an area which had seen high immigration since the 1950s. The project organiser involved local people in a range of events: gathering stories of individuals, families and neighbourhoods; setting up displays, exhibitions and theatre performances; running family history fun days and talks, tours and workshops on local themes; and producing history resources for primary schools in the area, which included a local history pack and, inspired by a theatre company production for Black History Month, a resource on the black anti-slavery campaigner Olaudah Equiano's visit to Sheffield in 1790.<sup>15</sup> Possibly due to the fact that many among the population do not have a long-standing relationship with the area, some developments — such as the Treasure Days and exhibitions in the local community, for example — were more popular than courses in local history, raising interesting questions about community engagement. See [www.museums-sheffield.org.uk/project-archive/burngreave-voices](http://www.museums-sheffield.org.uk/project-archive/burngreave-voices).

A further example focusing on South London communities:

*Memories of War*, a community-based social history project exploring new narratives and untold stories of the Second World War, has provided an excellent opportunity for students undertaking a work placement to explore the cultural and social history of the war through close collaboration with the local community. With emphasis on the personal narratives of the war, the first phase of the project involved students and volunteers recording and collecting the stories of the hundreds of people who came forward to share their memories. The oral history training provided by members of the history department encouraged the students and volunteers to consider the use of oral history as a discipline and the ways in which oral testimony can be gathered and presented in the digital age. Students undertaking the Level 5 course, Family and Community History, were also involved in interviews with the Eastbourne Women's Land Army group.

The culmination of the first phase of the project, the *Memories of War* exhibition and accompanying book, created a public space for the personal histories recorded. The creation of the exhibition was dependent upon successful collaboration with local archives as well as local museums. Part of the *Memories of War* exhibition focused on the London Blitz and attracted attention from local schools who were studying World War Two as part of the Year Six curriculum. Additionally, the *Race and Equality* project — a collaboration between Greenwich Council and Charlton Athletic Football Club — sought the help of the history department in training a group of 16–18 year olds to conduct oral history interviews with elders in their community.

15 Twells et al., *Olaudah Equiano in Sheffield*.

Community history shares with local history and heritage a potentially fraught relationship with academic history. But while community history projects do not adopt an academic method,<sup>16</sup> we would do well to recall the ‘heritage debates’ and to enjoy people’s great interest in history, and its role in giving expression to a sense of belonging and a pride in place, and as a factor in a civic consciousness.

At the same time, university tutors may find themselves in the unexpected position of having to defend academic history to students who have been whole-heartedly converted to the community history cause, and who use their community history to critique the academic approaches with which they have been acquainted during the course of their degree. It is as well to be prepared to meet this challenge!

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## Oral history

The post-war period has seen a huge growth of interest in oral history in Britain and America, the impetus for which has come from a range of sources. The folklorist and historian George Ewart Evans, for example, pioneered oral history work with agricultural labourers in Suffolk in the 1940s to the 1970s. From the 1960s, associated firstly with the work of E.P. Thompson and by the late 1960s, with the History Workshop movement, the commitment to 'history from below' inspired the commitment of oral historians to collect the life stories of people traditionally excluded from the historical record. Community publishing initiatives, such as QueenSpark in Brighton, developed from the newsletter which accompanied a campaign to turn the Royal Spa buildings in the town into a nursery school rather than a casino, collected and celebrated stories, memories and photographs of towns and neighbourhoods.<sup>17</sup>

Paul Thompson's pioneering book, *The Voice of the Past* (1978), brought oral history into academic history and challenged negative representations of oral history as more subjective and less reliable than other, supposedly more objective, forms of history. Thompson, a lecturer in social history at the University of Essex who played a leading role in the Oral History Society, wrote about the potential of oral history to break down barriers, not only between teachers and students, but between generations and between educational institutions and the world outside. A cooperative venture, this branch of the subject could give history back to people who lived it. By the end of the 1970s, oral history was a worldwide movement and the First International Conference on Oral History took place at the University of Essex in 1979.<sup>18</sup>

While the representation of oral history as a democratic sharing of information has been heavily criticised, the belief has held that, if used well, oral history can have a powerful impact upon people being interviewed. The oral history interview is not just a one-way process, through which the historian gets his/her material and the interviewee is a passive source. This can be seen in all manner of contexts. Holocaust survivors and refugees from various wars use oral history to 'bear witness', to

17 '40th Anniversary: history of QueenSpark and celebrations!' See [www.queensparkbooks.org.uk/theme/5.html](http://www.queensparkbooks.org.uk/theme/5.html) (accessed 28 June 2011).

18 For a wider discussion of the development of oral history, see Graham Smith's Historical Insights booklet, *Oral History*.

educate the public, and to find connections between their pre-war and post-war identities. Joanna Bornat has used oral history in care settings for the elderly, in the form of reminiscence work. The 'life review' — remembering, interpreting, dealing with unfinished business, maybe achieving a kind of reconciliation — has also been used in palliative care.<sup>19</sup>

Students can be initially resistant to the idea that oral history needs to be as rigorous as any other history they do, in terms of both method and interpretation. It is often only as they complete their first interview that they are truly enlightened about the importance of thorough preparation, in terms of researching the topic they want their interviewee to talk about, and the practice of interviewing itself, for which the literature is voluminous. Planning and reflection — on the process of finding a sample, drawing up sets of questions and considering the dynamic between interviewer and interviewee — are central to successful oral history.

There is also a huge literature on transcription. How to represent the north Sheffield accent without sounding patronising or like we were writing for one of those 'Ay up me duck' pamphlets was a dominant theme in my seminars this year — but my students, some of whom share the dialect, did not believe that such difficulties would occur, until they were confronted with the problem! Similarly, students at Greenwich found understanding and transcribing a 'Saarf London' accent equally challenging! Transcription is a long and arduous process and it is as well to limit the amount an individual has to do and to build in reflection on the process. This may mean resisting the tendency of some community history projects, hard-pushed for time, to have students transcribe hours of recordings.

Work on interpretation is perhaps the most exciting part of oral history writing, but in a community history project, where the brief is for a few interviews to develop the website, it is unlikely to take centre stage. At the very least, however, students need to consider the problematic assumption that oral histories present an unmediated account of experience and 'tell it like it was', and to engage with the concept of historical memory. The better students will transcend the simplistic arguments that our memories fail us, or that our spectacles become rose-tinted as the years progress, to engage fruitfully with some of the classic studies, such as Luisa Passerini's work on silences and jokes, or Alessandro Portelli's exploration of the use of oral history to explore not only events but the meanings attached to them and the positive dimensions of 'unreliable memories'. These themes are all discussed in Rob

19 R.L. Perks and A. Thompson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (London, 1998); J. Bornat, 'Reminiscence and oral history: some comparisons across parallel universes', in J.D. Webster and B.K. Haight, *Critical Advances in Reminiscence Work* (New York, 2002), pp. 33–43; J. Bornat, 'Doing life history research', in A. Jamieson and C. Victor, *Researching Ageing and Later Life: The Practice of Social Gerontology* (Buckingham, 2002); M. Winslow, K. Hitchcock and B. Noble, 'Recording lives: the benefits of an oral history service', *European Journal of Palliative Care* 16 (3) (2009), pp. 128–30.

Perks and Alistair Thompson's now-classic book, *The Oral History Reader* (2006), which should form the key text on any oral history reading list.

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## Schools' history

In order to successfully be involved in producing materials for history teaching in schools, it is necessary for students to have some knowledge not only of the National Curriculum, but of current debates about methods of teaching and the purpose of schools' history.

Many students will have reflected on styles of history teaching as part of their own transition to higher education. Some will have concluded, for example, that A-level teaching often relies on a 'traditional' view of the pupil as in a passive relationship to a didactically-engaged teacher. They may remember also that their own primary years embodied a more active style of learning, aspects of which they have been required to rekindle in their university studies.

Methods and purpose have been intimately connected in the history of history teaching. In the words of Chris Husbands, writing about the approach in the early 20th century: 'At its heart lay the acquisition of a relatively complex knowledge about an assumed shared national political culture and there were strong connections between the nature of the school history syllabus and the Whig interpretation of a largely progressive development of democracy, welfare and improvement.'<sup>20</sup> This saw a solid focus on a collection of historical facts and significant events and individuals that, it was believed, should be imparted to all school pupils.

The most significant challenge to this approach came in the 1960s, with the emergence of Schools Council History and other related movements. Influenced by Piaget, emphasis was placed not on the didactic role of the teacher, but on the place of the learner within this relationship. The teacher's role was reconceptualised, to become one of introducing sources and supporting students in their efforts to interpret them through discussion, investigation and argument. The Schools' Council History (13–16) Project, which was led by David Sylvester at the University of Leeds in 1972–6, also questioned the content of much taught history. Operating in the context of the rise of social history, 'history from below', women's history and so on, it developed a new focus on the experiences of the dispossessed and oppressed, producing resources on Native Americans, peoples of Peru or of the Arctic. The purpose of history teaching was also questioned. In the 1970s, when high unemployment suggested young people would have increased leisure time, the

emphasis was placed on enabling students to become good citizens rather than academic historians.

The first National Curriculum, implemented in September 1991, and the revised National Curriculum from 1995, retained this focus on skills which was popular with teachers. At the same time, the idea of the ‘great tradition’ in terms of content experienced a revival. Kenneth Baker argued that history should ‘help pupils come to understand how a free and democratic society has developed over the centuries’.<sup>21</sup> To do this, it should place at its core the history of Britain and its political and cultural heritage. In 1998, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), the government body responsible for the review of the National Curriculum, stated that ‘the school curriculum should contribute to the development of pupils’ sense of identity through knowledge and understanding of their ... social and cultural heritages ... It should pass on the enduring values of society’.<sup>22</sup>

Of course, these ‘enduring values’ are contested, and many historians do not see them located in history teaching which focuses on the British monarchy or Parliamentary system. The debate that in 1989 centred on whether to include slavery and colonialism in units of study which celebrated Britain’s ‘greatness’ in the 19th century has returned with questions about how we should ensure that all of our pupils’ histories are represented in the curriculum. In 2007, for example, an Ofsted report, *History in the Balance*, criticised the lack of engagement by many schools with black and ethnic minority histories.<sup>23</sup> These questions of inclusion and, as Niall Ferguson enters the picture, the dangers of pressing British history into delivering a political agenda, are good debates for students to get their teeth into.<sup>24</sup>

Students are further engaged by thinking through the challenges that face the subject of history in the 2010s. While the subject remains popular at GCSE and at A-level, it is the case that, unlike in the rest of Europe, history is not compulsory for 14–16 year-olds in UK schools. According to the *History in the Balance* report, the subject has little priority in primary education, where it accounts for just four per cent of time (anything from 30–90 minutes per week), and experiences a ‘squeeze’ because of the overwhelming focus on literacy and numeracy. The subject tends to be at its strongest in the early years of secondary education, but dips again at key stage 4 (KS4).

21 Ibid.

22 QCA, 1998, p. 5.

23 Ofsted, *History in the Balance. History in English Schools, 2003–07* (2007), available at [www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Education/Curriculum/History/Primary/History-in-the-balance](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Education/Curriculum/History/Primary/History-in-the-balance)

24 D. Nicholls, ‘Building a better past: plans to reform the curriculum’, *Teaching History* 128 (September 2007), 60–66

In addition to not engaging sufficiently with local history or with black/ethnic minority history, Ofsted echoes the criticisms of university lecturers that a disproportionate amount of time is spent on British history and on the Nazis and 20th-century dictatorships. Other challenges come from the rise of citizenship education, which became an additional national curriculum component from 2002 at KS3 and KS4, and the national KS3 Strategy, introduced to address the 'attainment dip' at KS3, which has had implications for history. In particular, the focus on foundation subjects (English, maths, science) and information and communications technology (ICT) has taken time from other subjects. Finally, changes in the organisation of secondary schooling can have an impact on history, particularly in specialist schools which emphasise vocationalism or do not include the study of the humanities.<sup>25</sup>

Most community history education projects will focus on local history, and it is an instructive exercise for students to see where the possibilities lie. At KS3, there is space for local studies. At primary level, schools can exercise some choice about where they place particular topics within the curriculum, from Reception to Year 6. All of the following have scope for community history:

- Unit 9. What was it like for children in the Second World War?
- Unit 11. What was it like for children living in Victorian Britain?
- Unit 12. How did life change in our locality in Victorian times?
- Unit 13. How has life in Britain changed since 1948?
- Unit 17. What are we remembering on Remembrance Day?
- Unit 18. What was it like to live here in the past?

There is a plethora of books and websites containing ideas for lessons. Once they have 'matched' their project to the appropriate unit, students can explore the range of possible subjects on which they might focus, the available sources (including maps, local buildings, photographs and written and oral sources), and ideas for enquiry-based learning, the opportunities offered for field work and for the consideration of 'citizenship issues'. All of this, it goes without saying, is invaluable for a PGCE application.

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## Block B: Setting up work-related projects in history

After the preparatory weeks, the students embark upon their work-related project — which might involve working in a school, for a museum or a community history organisation, with a brief to produce something ‘of use’ to that organisation. Typically, this can be a small piece of research, some oral history interviews, or an education resource for a local museum or community history group.

The suggested seminar topics above do not come to an end when the student embarks on the work-related project part of the module, but form the focus of workshops and guidance throughout this part of the module.

The focus here is on the practicalities setting up a work-related project, as some of these issues can be daunting for history lecturers.

The first rule when planning work-related learning projects with external organisations is that there must be benefits for all concerned. We have to acknowledge that employers/project providers, while they can enjoy the freshness and ideas that new people bring to their organisation, sometimes see students as more trouble than they are worth, and that we need therefore to offer a clear benefit for them. At the same time, it is important to manage expectations. Those project providers who expect that final year history students can write an entire KS2 education pack have to understand that students are learning and are not ‘experts’ who are providing a ‘service’ — and that they have assessment tasks to complete. It is a good first move for the module leader to make visits to museums, other heritage sites, community history projects, and so on in order to meet the project contacts. Personal contact is always best, and this is a good time to clarify expectations. Project providers need to know what is expected of the student, in terms of the hours they can put in, the final output, and their own role, particularly the number of meetings they should arrange with the student, and the desirability of email availability.

Next, to ensure students appreciate some of these expectations, Helen Day suggests adding a professional conduct clause to the module guide/Blackboard site, such as the following: ‘When your project necessitates contact with outside bodies, you will be a representative of the University and must therefore act accordingly. You will be required to maintain a professional working relationship with the organisation. Thus you must keep all appointments made and apologise for any unavoidable absence. You must be on time, dress and behave appropriately and abide by any company rules and regulations. In cases where your project involves outside bodies, it will be

necessary to ensure that proper health and safety training is undertaken and that the organisation has any appropriate insurance cover.<sup>126</sup>

It may be advisable to draw up a learning contract or professional agreement between the student, the project provider and the university tutor/institution. It is good practice for students to consider their project against the university's ethics checklist. Alternatively, their project may involve working with an organisation where a separate ethics clearance is required (for example, the NHS). Issues of privacy and confidentiality will need to be discussed with students undertaking oral history interviews. Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks will be required, if students are working in schools or with other vulnerable members of the community.

It may also be worthwhile getting students to have a look at the university's Code of Conduct for Research and also Lone Working Policy, where these exist. The latter usually refers particularly to students conducting research and focuses on safety in interviewing, but it is of relevance for students working in unfamiliar environments (at archives, community projects, museums and so on) The links to all relevant documents can be made available in the module guide, and students asked to dip into these as part of their preparation for one of the early seminars.

It is important to think about equality and diversity issues in context of the Equality Act 2010. If all students are to have access to placements, we need to ensure that CRB checks are dealt with sensitively, and that students know where to turn if they face discrimination. It will be useful for them to recognise that knowledge and understanding of equality issues is an employability skill.

Health and Safety is the issue that turns many people away from designing work-related modules. It can be a useful (and entertaining) exercise for students to undertake a risk assessment in relation to their project: its environment, public transport, or any other particular risks. This is now not sufficient for most institutions, however, which will require staff to fill in forms if students are to go off campus. There may be a need for health and safety and risk assessments of individual projects. In the absence of any administrative support, the module leader can draw up the forms to be used each year and include them in the module guide. While it is important not to scare students — most of the risks are not beyond those evident in daily life — discussions of necessary precautions, awareness of potential risks, the importance of carrying a mobile phone and letting friends or family know where they are should be covered in one of the preparatory seminars. There may also be occasions when students wish to be debriefed after an event.

## Support mechanisms

A work-related learning module needs to have appropriate support mechanisms put in place. Evidence suggests that work-related learning is more resource-intensive than traditional modes of learning. Both support for students and preparation, especially if it involves a visit to every project provider, are time-consuming. Ideally, tutors would have an allowance for the additional responsibilities incurred, to include:

- setting up project opportunities
- visiting prospective providers
- providing preparation for the placement
- health and safety briefings
- managing the expectations of students and providers
- liaising with providers
- fire-fighting and damage limitation when poor relations develop
- writing references.

Administrative support may be requested to complete CRB checks, health and safety issues and risk assessments, the tasks that are the main obstacles to the development of work-related learning modules. Clarity over roles and responsibilities is of course paramount. This is a work-setting issue and one to fight for in your institution.

## Academic issues: assessment

There are a few, but not an overwhelming number of, academic issues. A main concern when designing a work-related learning module is to ensure students are aware of the relevant academic debates which form part of the context for the project they are undertaking. Thus, students who produce work for museums should be required to contextualise their own work in terms of writing about the aims of museums, museum strategy and so on.

Most of the academic issues are related to assessment. A key component in creating the work-related project is deciding on the most appropriate form(s) of assessment. What is the best way to monitor and assess externally-facing projects? The QAA revised Benchmarks for History (2007) acknowledge 'the growing number and importance of learning activities such as fieldwork, community-based projects, work placements and so on' but with students undertaking different types of projects and placements — in archives, museums, schools (primary and secondary), community history projects and the heritage sector — it is essential to develop an assessment strategy that is viable across the board as well as fulfilling the subject specific and generic skills, as described in section 3.3 of the QAA History benchmarking document. Among other issues concerning group work is the fact that sometimes a project needs more than one person working on it to make it viable. It is advisable

not to have a flat-mark, however: if a group of two or three receive a joint mark for their project, the rest of the assessment package should be mixed to enable differentiation.

Given the nature of work-related projects and the need to ensure that history students are able to complete both the practical project and to situate it in terms of the academic literature, we suggest that the assessment includes the project itself and other tasks which require reflection on public history and which fulfil the careers management part of the module.

## The work-related project

The project can take many forms, including: oral history interviews; historical research; the production of a Teaching and Learning Resource (TLR) based around local archival materials to be used in the teaching of a particular topic in a variety of educational settings; a local history study; the creation of an exhibition; research for and production of an academic paper for publication or an overview/cataloguing exercise for an archive. Because the students are engaging in primary archival research, much of which has not been used in this context before, the opportunities for plagiarism are limited. More importantly perhaps, the desire to plagiarise is diminished as the sense of 'ownership' in creating an original piece of work from which others will benefit and which reaches a wider audience (unlike most undergraduate essays which have an average readership of two) becomes the main focus.

For most students, their project will not be 'academic', and so will need to be supplemented by assessment tasks which allow them to demonstrate their grasp of academic reading and debates. These could include a reflective log or report, in which students can record their progress for the duration of the project, and which will enable them to keep a detailed account of the various roles and responsibilities they undertake. It will also contextualise the practical experience of work by enabling students to reflect on their experience as well as the politics of the workplace. This type of assessment minimises opportunities (as well as a desire or need) to plagiarise as students submit the log at regular intervals and discuss their experiences in tutorials. Because the focus is on their experience it requires them to write critically in a way that is quite different and therefore not easily copied.

In addition, for modules which include a careers management element, students will need to complete assessments task which demonstrate their engagement with careers issues. This could be, for example, a combination of a case study, a reflective log/journal, a seminar presentation, a personal statement and/or a CV, or an action plan. See below for further discussion of careers management.

A project report may be completed by the host/project provider. This report can cover practical and academic considerations such as: working effectively and appropriately with others; working as a self-directed reflective learner; ability to communicate ideas appropriately and effectively, both verbally and in writing; research and analytical skills; managing information; and good time management skills. As the tutor will have had regular contact with the project provider and received ongoing feedback, it is usual for the report to be an accurate reflection of the student's performance on the project/placement. Whether or not this forms part of the assessment package will depend on the institution. It may be that the report is proof of student engagement but is not part of the final grading.

Very little has been published on the assessment of work-based learning — particularly in history higher education programmes. However, a project on *The Assessment of Workplace Learning* has recently been completed by Richard Hawkins and Harvey Woolf in which HE history programmes offering workplace learning were surveyed on their provision and assessment.<sup>27</sup>

27 Funded by the History Subject Centre, the findings of *The Assessment of Workplace Learning in UK Undergraduate History Programmes* can be found in the recently published *History Graduates with Impact* (History Subject Centre, July 2011), see [www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/publications/](http://www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/publications/). Further details on the project can be found at [www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/research/gwi/wpl](http://www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/research/gwi/wpl).

## Block C: Careers management

In the final block, students will have four weeks in which to reflect upon their work-related project and think about how they might package their experience for a prospective employer. They are required during these weeks to: produce a ten-minute presentation on their project for the seminar group; to write a personal statement in which they describe their project and analyse the skills they have used and developed; and to choose an employment field to research and write an action plan, detailing the steps they would need to take in order to apply for a job in that field.

The shape of a careers management block will depend entirely on the structure and resourcing of the careers service in individual institutions. In some universities, the careers service may be able to contribute to this part of the programme. In others, they may be depleted in number and status and no longer have the resources to contribute to the delivery of lectures and workshops on careers-related topics. Many careers services will have produced a range of excellent resources which can be adapted with relative ease to develop a series of activities which are appropriately subject-specific. We have used an interactive careers management skills module in designing this section.

In preparation for all seminars, for example, SHU students are required to work their way through the 'Careers Central' resource on the Careers Service website. They are given various options for exploring a known career, or identifying their skills, interests and values in order to settle on an employment sector to explore further. Advice and activities relate to, for example, application forms, covering letters, CVs, interviews, master's courses and many more. At Greenwich, students undertake a similar exercise using the Guidance and Employability resources and Personal Development Planning (PDP) packs.

Possible seminar topics for follow-up discussions include:

- employability skills: what are they? How do we identify them, and how do we analyse what employers are looking for?
- student reflections on their projects and achievements and the skills they have learned.
- careers action planning. In preparation, students research an area of employment they are interested in knowing more about. They should research the sector including: the qualifications required, desirable personal attribute/skills, salary and conditions, the career structure, examples of employers. They are then required to work out what steps are needed to take them from where they are now to where they want to be, including the knowledge to be developed along the way. Students can work to the following checklist:

- evaluate your current situation and explain the action plan
- review progress to date towards this goal
- specify what you need to find out and the actions necessary, with timescales
- investigate resources and useful contacts likely to be helpful
- clarify any gaps in your knowledge, experience or skill areas.

The various tools available to assist in this process are well worth investigating via your university's careers service website.

Students should also be encouraged to book in for an individual CV check with the careers service.

## Final thoughts

David Nicholls's valuable report, *The Employment of History Graduates* (2005), has recently been updated and presents us with a very timely assessment of the state of history as a discipline and its future prospects. In particular, Nicholls draws on the experience of successful (and indeed famous) history graduates who contributed to interviews for the Historical Association's DVD in which they confirmed the important role that the skills they had acquired from studying history had played in preparing them for their careers. For Nicholls (and others) the question that naturally arises is — if a history education is such a boon to employability, why is its place in the curriculum not more widely promoted by the politicians who shape education policy, many of whom are themselves beneficiaries of just such an education? The threat posed by government policies to the future of a history education seems positively contradictory if not perverse.<sup>28</sup>

Nonetheless, it must not be forgotten that the single most important reason for students choosing to study history is their enjoyment of the subject and that is a crucial prerequisite for learning to take place. Hopefully, this booklet shows that employability skills can be embedded within the subject without compromising academic integrity and can be pursued in a lively and engaging way which makes connections between academic history and the wider public interest in our subject.

28 D. Nicholls, 'The employment of history graduates: an update', available at [www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross\\_fac/heahistory/resources/br\\_nicholls\\_employmentupdate\\_20110320.pdf](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/heahistory/resources/br_nicholls_employmentupdate_20110320.pdf)

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## Appendix A: Safety advice

### General safety advice

Know who your contact is while on placement/at the host project. This person will provide you with information on safe working and arrange for any necessary training for the work you are undertaking.

If you are to spend any amount of time at a specific external site, you must be given an induction when starting on a work placement to include:

- health and safety issues. Full information on the employer's health and safety policy, responsibilities and procedures should be included. Any particular risks associated with the work should be indicated
- advice on and access to personal protective equipment and facilities should be provided if required. Training in the use of any personal protective equipment and facilities should also be provided
- any restrictions which apply to actions, activities and locations within the workplace should be provided
- information on action to take in the event of an accident or injury should be provided
- if there may be occasions where you will be working alone, follow your employer's lone working procedures. If there are no written procedures, ask your module leader for advice.

### Fire

Due to the variety of work which is carried out and the type and layout of buildings in which students may be on a placement, it is not possible to produce a set of detailed instructions that cover every emergency situation which may arise. Each employer should have emergency instructions relating to their premises and every building should have notices displayed setting out the procedure to follow in case of fire.

### Lifting and carrying

Injuries from lifting and carrying can be painful and debilitating. Always use any equipment provided such as trolleys where provided to move material. Take care to:

- lift and carry only what you can easily manage
- make sure you can see where you are going
- obtain assistance with anything that may be too heavy or awkward to manage on your own
- not do it, if in doubt — ask for help

## Electricity

When using electrical equipment make sure that you:

- understand any particular instructions for using the equipment
- always switch off at the mains before connecting or disconnecting any electrical appliance
- do not use and report any damaged electrical equipment, cables or extension leads

## Hazardous substances

When using or working with substances at work:

- follow any particular instructions given by your employer
- read the procedures and precautions for using a substance
- read any hazard warning signs and the instructions on the containers
- find out what you need to do if there is a spillage or contact with skin, eyes, fumes or ingestion of the substance
- do not transfer any substance into unlabelled or wrongly-labelled containers
- wear any personal protective equipment required

## Work outside of normal hours

Many organisations have rules with regard to working outside normal hours. For many offices, 18.00 to 08.00 Monday to Friday, all day Saturday, Sunday, bank holidays and other official holidays are usually regarded as outside normal hours. The explicit authority of the management of the organisation should be obtained before working outside of normal hours. There should be an 'Out-of-Hours' and/or 'Lone Working' procedure(s) for this type of work.

## Noise

Noise can cause damage to hearing, reduce efficiency or at the very least cause annoyance. Continuous exposure to excessive noise levels can produce deafness. Impairment to hearing may pass unrecognised for a long period of time due to the chronic (long-term) nature of the effect. Damage to hearing can also result from a sudden violent sound such as a loud explosion which can cause the rupture of an ear drum. For advice on noise problems at work, you should consult the organisation's safety officer.

## Appendix B: Risk assessment — discussion points

Before you begin your project, you should assess the *potential* health and safety risks associated with your proposed project (even if they are very unlikely), and how you can minimise these. Some potential risks may include the following:

- injury or fatality travelling to/from project venue
- health risks (e.g. disease or injury) associated with a particular venue
- actual or threatened violence, psychological harm, unwanted sexual advances and so on from a project participant
- allegations that you acted inappropriately
- being implicated in illegal activities
- psychological distress aroused by a topic with which you have unresolved personal issues.

You should remember that (a) anyone can be at risk (male or female, black or white and so on), but that (b) these risks are extremely unlikely! However, the university needs to know that you have thought about them in relation to your project.

Below are some suggestions for good practice. Many of these relate to oral history interviews, but may be appropriate for other work-related projects:

- try to obtain as much information in advance about the project, the area of town it is in, and the likely participants
- talk to the project contact on the phone in advance of a visit. If you are conducting interviews, discuss the venue, and the people who are likely to be present with the interviewee (if any)
- plan your use of public transport; have a number for taxis; consider the safety of car parking; and consider any local tensions that it would be advisable to be aware of (unlikely to be relevant for a history project)
- consider arriving early to familiarise self with area, local amenities and public places, make self-visible, plan escape routes, note location of such amenities as phone boxes, parking and study maps
- make sure someone else — family member, flatmate — knows where you are
- make clear at the outset of interview that you have a schedule, arrange to be called when the interview should be closed, keep mobile on but put on silent or discreet setting — never turn it off
- do not give your personal details to participants
- proper informed consent must be appropriately in place before the research commences
- CRB/Independent Safeguarding Authority checks for research staff working with children or vulnerable adults must be in place
- avoid unnecessary risks, e.g. waiting for a bus or visiting late at night, especially in areas perceived to be high risk

- carry enough money to get home — but not too much. Have a phone card for payphone
- dress inconspicuously
- keep equipment and valuable items hidden.

## Appendix C: Standard risk assessment proforma

Step 1: Define the scope of the risk assessment					
Process:		Place(s):			
Type of assessment: Generic/Specific assessment		New/Existing process	RA Ref:	Frequency of review:	
Step 2: Identify the hazards		Step 3: Identify who might be harmed	Step 4: Identify existing controls and their reliability	Step 5: Level of risk	
Ref	Hazard				
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					

## Appendix D: Possible questions and criteria for project providers

1. Has the student engaged well with the project?
2. Has the student listened to the project contact regarding the aims of the project?
3. Did the student work effectively and appropriately with others (if appropriate)?
4. Did the student work in a self-directed way?
5. Has the student communicated appropriately and effectively, both verbally and in writing?
6. Has the student demonstrated good information management skills?
7. Has the student demonstrated good time management skills?
8. What problems has the student had (if any) during the course of the placement?
9. What have been the benefits to your organisation of the student's work?
10. What have been the benefits of this project to the student?
11. How did the student help in making this project successful or otherwise?
12. How did the student contribute to meeting project aims?
13. Did the project reach the required/a new audience? And if so, how?
14. Summary (any other feedback).





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