



Employability

REVISED EDITION FOR 2009

**Where next? Unlocking the potential of
your *theology or religious studies* degree**



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This guide is an updated version of the 2007 edition, which was compiled from the 2004 Subject Centre publication, 'A Brief Guide to Employability in Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies', written by Julie Gallimore, and research written by Peter Forbes and Bianca Kubler for the Enhancing Student Employability Coordination Team of the Higher Education Academy (ESECT) and the Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE), together with new material developed, researched, compiled and edited by Danielle Lamb, Julie Closs and Rebecca O'Loughlin, for the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies, part of the Higher Education Academy.

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Aim of this guide

Using this employability guide is a way to help you, as a theology and/or religious studies (TRS) student, reflect on the skills you are gaining as you study, and gather evidence of these skills being put into practice. Sometimes, when studying a non-vocational subject, it can be hard to see how what you learn in the course of your studies will prepare you for your post-university career. Being comfortable with this yourself, and getting it across to future employers, is vital, particularly in subjects such as theology and religious studies where there are plenty of popular misconceptions about what studying them actually entails.

Evidence of the skills you possess can also come from work experience and extra-curricular activities. Reflecting on these skills can help with writing up progress files or personal development planning, CV writing and job applications. There are lots of general resources available about how to write a good CV or job application, and how to do well in interviews, and you will find information about some of these in the 'Resources' section at the end. This guide doesn't attempt to replace those resources, but rather to get you thinking about the specific skills that studying TRS develops, and how you can use examples to demonstrate your skills when you apply for a job or go for an interview. The most important thing that we hope this guide will do is help you to articulate why you will be a good employee (because of all the skills you've developed by doing TRS) so that you can get the job you want.

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| This section aims to give you stepping stones to finding out more about applying for jobs, improving your employability, and other related topics. There are many useful sources of information out there, and we hope this guide will inspire you to use your initiative and imagination to look further and aim higher in your future career. | |

I. What makes TRS graduates employable?

Introduction to employability

The term 'employability', as we are using it here, refers to how the degree you are studying for prepares you for success in working life. TRS graduates are highly employable, offering multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary skills, and detailed knowledge of diverse world views and issues. TRS graduates are able to critically analyse and evaluate issues from a variety of perspectives, drawing on practical experience and academic skills.

There are plenty of career opportunities for TRS graduates, but often in roles that bear no obvious relation to the study of theology or religion, so you need to be able to demonstrate sound transferable skills, which employers value. This guide will help you to think about the general skills you are developing, like the ability to think logically, analyse critically, and communicate articulately and accurately, both orally and in writing. You're also learning reasoning and debating skills, skills associated with cultural and religious sensitivity and the ability to formulate and address problems creatively. In addition, your degree is likely to cover other valuable topics, such as history, languages, anthropology, politics and textual analysis, meaning that you leave university with a grounding in a broad range of subjects. In an increasingly global economy, the skills of vision, creativity and religious sensitivity, which are developed through the study of TRS, will be at a premium.

Due to the transferable nature of the skills that the study of TRS develops, the kinds of jobs that TRS graduates go on to are extremely diverse. However, some sectors that have been known to employ large numbers of TRS graduates include the following:

- the National Health Service (NHS);
- the civil service;
- other local and national government and public administration bodies;
- social, youth, community and advice work;
- teaching;
- higher education;
- sales and advertising;
- human resources;
- investment and banking;
- management consultancy;
- law, both solicitors and barristers;
- accountancy;
- religious ministry;
- the charity or not-for-profit sector;
- Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs);
- publishing;
- journalism;
- recruitment.

Several of these sectors include jobs and career pathways that would obviously require further study, training or qualifications, and you can find more information about this in section 5.

Employability skills

We've already touched on some skills that you will be developing, but what can be expected of you, as a TRS graduate? What kinds of skills can you expect your degree to develop in you?

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) is an independent body that safeguards and helps to improve the academic standards and quality of higher education in the UK. One of its tasks has been to develop a 'Benchmark Statement' for each subject, outlining specific skills that students can expect to gain from studying for their degree, to help measure and maintain the standards of the university education you are being provided with. This can be helpful for you to look at as it breaks down what you are actually doing as you read, write or talk about TRS, in much more detail than you will probably be used to. Hopefully this will help get you into the frame of mind where you can see how what you do in university classes can be transferred for use elsewhere. So, taken from the TRS Benchmark Statement, here is a list of the employability skills you are developing as a TRS student. It is a long list, but it is aiming to be a definitive guide to the skills you are gaining as you study.

(The full benchmark statement can be found on the QAA website at:

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/statements/theology.asp>)

General TRS skills

1. The ability to understand how people have thought and acted in contexts other than the student's own, how beliefs, doctrines and practices have developed within particular social and cultural contexts and how religious traditions have changed over time.
2. The ability to read and use texts both critically and empathetically, while addressing such questions as genre, content, context, perspective, purpose, original and potential meaning, and the effect of translation if the text is not read in the original language.
3. The appreciation of the complexity of different mentalities, social behaviours and aesthetic responses, and of the ways they have been shaped by beliefs and values, and conversely how beliefs, sacred texts and art forms have been shaped by society and politics.
4. Sensitivity to the problems of religious language and experience, and to the issues of multiple and conflicting interpretations of language and symbols, texts and traditions. Simplistic, literalising or doctrinaire explanations are less likely to be advanced by a student of TRS.
5. Appreciation of both the interconnectedness of and internal tensions within a system of beliefs and practices.

Critical and analytical skills

6. Basic critical and analytical skills: a recognition that statements should be tested, that evidence and arguments are subject to assessment, that the interpreter's role demands critical evaluation.
7. The ability to employ a variety of methods of study in analysing material, to think independently, set tasks and solve problems.
8. The capacity to give a clear and accurate account of a subject, marshal arguments in a mature way and engage in debate and dialogue with respect for the opposite case or different viewpoint.
9. Empathy and imaginative insight.
10. Self-discipline and self-direction.
11. Independence of mind and initiative.
12. Ability to attend to others and have respect for others' views.
13. Ability to gather, evaluate and synthesise different types of information.
14. Analytical ability and the capacity to formulate questions and solve problems.

Generic skills

15. Presentation skills, both oral and written.
16. IT skills, including word-processing, communicating by email and using the Internet, accessing information from electronic as well as non-electronic sources.
17. Teamwork skills.
18. Writing skills, including accurate referencing and clarity of expression.
19. Ability to attend closely to the meaning of written documents.
20. Ability to read texts in a different language.

2. What do employers want from you?

Desired employee attributes and skills

To help you see things from the perspective of an employer, we have provided a list of the qualities typically sought by employers, with their definitions. These were identified by employer members of the Policy Forum of the Council for Industry and Higher Education (the CIHE is a council of leading people from a wide range of businesses, universities and colleges). The employers on the CIHE believe that these skills are the key components observed in individuals who can transform organisations and add value early in their careers. The skills listed below are ones that employers say they want from all employees, and we have added more detail to help you think about how to demonstrate that your TRS degree has developed these skills in you.

Cognitive skills/brainpower

The ability to identify and solve problems, work with information and handle a mass of diverse data, assess risk and draw conclusions.

Although this could fall under the heading of ‘generic skills’ (those that may be covered during the course of study of any degree) note that the critical and analytic skills in Section 1 tie in with this particularly well, meaning that you, as a TRS student, have a particular advantage here.

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Analysis | Relates and compares data from different sources, identifying issues, securing relevant information and identifying relationships. |
| Attention to detail | Accomplishes tasks through a concern for all areas involved, no matter how small. |
| Judgement | Determines the most appropriate course of action and draws conclusions that are based on logical assumptions that reflect factual information. |
| Planning and organising | Establishes a course of action for self and/or others to accomplish a specific goal. Plans proper assignments of personnel and appropriate allocation of resources. |

Generic competencies

High-level and transferable key skills such as the ability to work with others in a team, communicate, persuade and have interpersonal sensitivity.

In studying for your TRS degree you will be familiar with discussing difficult topics with others, developing your ideas through this discussion, and influencing others. TRS students also have a particular advantage in demonstrating skills connected with interpersonal sensitivity. Remember that there are ways that you can use your course to demonstrate these skills apart from purely what goes on when you study. If you set up a study group to discuss your work, or attend or help run a TRS society, these are things you could also use to demonstrate such competencies.

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Influencing | Influences others by expressing self effectively in a group and in one to one situations. |
| Interpersonal sensitivity | Recognises and respects different perspectives and appreciates the benefits of being open to the ideas and views of others. |
| Listening | Shows by a range of verbal and non-verbal signals that the information being received is understood. |
| Questioning | Uses an appropriate approach to questioning in order to gain information from which to draw conclusions and/or assist in the making of decisions. |
| Written communication | Expresses ideas effectively and conveys information appropriately and accurately. |

Personal capabilities

The ability and desire to learn for oneself and improve one's self awareness and performance. To be a self starter (creativity, decisiveness, initiative) and to finish the job (flexibility, adaptability, tolerance to stress).

To succeed in TRS, you need to be able to think for yourself and have the intellectual courage and creativity to develop your own viewpoints. You are also developing skills such as being able to see the wider framework that particular arguments work within, and using opposition to your arguments as a tool to refine them and take them further. The flexibility and sensitivity that doing a degree in TRS develops are also much sought-after attributes.

| | |
|---|--|
| Achievement orientation | Maintains and inspires a results-driven approach, focuses on results and critical performance indicators. |
| Adaptability/flexibility | Maintains effectiveness in a changing environment. |
| Creativity | Generates and/or recognises how best practice and imaginative ideas can be applied to different situations. |
| Decisiveness | Makes decisions and takes action. |
| Initiative | Identifies opportunities and is pro-active in putting forward ideas and potential solutions. |
| Leadership | Takes responsibility for the directions and actions of a team. |
| Life long learning and development | Develops the skills and competencies of self, peers and colleagues through learning and development activities related to current and future roles. |
| Organisational sensitivity | Is sensitive to the effect of his or her actions on other parts of the organisation and adopts a mature, direct and up front style in dealing with conflict. |

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Personal development | Maintains an up to date personal development plan and takes action to ensure personal development takes place. |
| Teamwork/working with others | Builds and develops appropriate relationships with academic staff, peers, colleagues, customers and suppliers at all levels within an organisation. |
| Tolerance for stress | Maintains performance under pressure and/or opposition. |

Technical ability

For example, having the knowledge and experience of working with relevant modern laboratory equipment.

While you may not think that TRS imparts any particular technical knowledge, your use of IT to research and write, and the other skills you may learn such as using email to network, or project management software to help you plan larger projects, are invaluable here. You might also use IT equipment and different software packages when doing a presentation in class. Don't underestimate the value of such technical knowledge – use your time at university to develop these skills and always make them explicit when applying for jobs.

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Technical application | Has experience of using modern technology. |
| Technical knowledge | Develops and maintains a body of knowledge of key trends in technology. |

Business and/or organisation awareness

An appreciation of how businesses operate through having had (preferably relevant) work experience.

Although this set of skills seems to be purely related to work experience, as a TRS student you are very well equipped to build up this type of knowledge. When you apply for a job, spend time using your research skills to build up an understanding of the organisation you want to work within, and how your role will interact with the business processes. And of course, if you know what particular line of work you want to go into after your degree, setting up some work experience or summer or part time work in the relevant area will be invaluable.

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Commercial awareness | Understands the economics of the business. Understands the business benefits and commercial realities from both the organisation's and the customer's perspectives. |
| Financial awareness | Understands basic financial terminology used in organisations and is able to construct and maintain simple financial records. |
| Organisation understanding | Understands the organisation's work environment, internal politics, business objectives and strategy. |
| Process operation | Begins, controls and concludes a complete process or procedure. |

Practical elements – vocational courses

Critical evaluation of the outcomes of professional practice; reflect and review own practice; participate in and review quality control processes and risk management.

Unless your course is a vocational one, it might be difficult to see how you can demonstrate these kinds of skills within the context of your studies. However, going to conferences or TRS society meetings can help you to gain experience of talking to people at a higher level in the same business (learning about and contributing to the study of TRS) as you. And if you decide that you want to do a particular vocational course, your ability to assimilate knowledge and understand processes will stand you in good stead.

Image

Presents a strong, professional, positive image to others at all times. This image is consistent with all people (colleagues, management and peers, customers etc.).

Professional expertise

Keeps up to date with developments in own areas of professional specialisation. Applies a breadth and/or depth of professional knowledge.

3. Applying your employability knowledge

Two of the main activities involved in acquiring a job are writing applications and attending interviews. Below, we look at some real job adverts and selection criteria used by employers, and suggest some reflective questions that you can ask yourself when preparing for interviews. We have looked at the extent to which they match up with the skills highlighted in Section 1, and this should help you to get a better idea of how to link up what you can do with what employers are asking for.

Job adverts

The criteria taken from the job specification or description are shown in the box in the centre. In the boxes round the outside, we have annotated the criteria with examples of the way in which a TRS student might demonstrate how their skills satisfy the criteria, and which skills from the Benchmark statement in Section 1 are relevant for each point (shown in numbers in brackets after the text). You could try doing this yourself with job adverts and selection criteria you're interested in.

Example 1: the law firm

These criteria are given by a leading law firm as the qualities and skills they want in a graduate trainee. As you can see, this employer is looking for very similar skills to those listed in Section 2. For example, cognitive skills such as analysis and judgement, personal capabilities such as creativity and teamwork, and technical abilities in the use of IT.

“Training Contract Applications”

Bright – Generally we look for a 2:1 at degree level. You need a **sharp mind**, the **ability to tackle complex legal and business issues** and take a commercial view.

Articulate – Building relationships with clients is a vital part of the modern lawyer's daily workload. We look for **confident, outgoing team players** who can get on well with clients, win their trust and keep their business.

Inquisitive and adaptable – The legal field is always changing – with new statutes to apply, new issues to address and new ways of doing business – so a **naturally inquiring mind** is a great asset. You'll need to relish the fact that you'll **never stop training, learning or adapting**.

You **tackle complex issues** every time you read or write or discuss issues in TRS, and this **sharpens your mind**. (1, 2, 3, 7, 14)

Learning about other cultures and points of view will develop the kind of **empathy, respect and integrity** that will win **trust**. (9, 12)

An **inquiring mind** is one of the core requirements of any TRS student, and a quality that is developed in TRS by reading texts, writing essays and discussing issues in class. (4, 6, 11)

Regularly putting forward opinions to back up your arguments in tutorials develops **confidence** and the ability to **work with others** in coming to a mutually acceptable conclusion. (8, 17)

Studying for your degree will place an emphasis on research skills and knowledge acquisition i.e. library use, internet research, determining the appropriate nature of source materials etc. that will form the basis of **lifelong learning**. (10, 11)

Interpretation of primary source texts and arguments is something the TRS student does on a regular basis. (2, 4, 7, 13)

Developing workable solutions to problems should be something you do in class discussions on a regular basis. (7)

Writing essays using Microsoft Word or other word processing packages, and **using the Internet** to research different ideas or contribute to wikis etc. develops your IT skills. Always make sure you make these skills explicit when applying for jobs. (16)

Creative and practical – Interpreting complex law and developing solutions to demanding commercial briefs takes a great deal of processing power, coupled with a **creative, analytical and pragmatic approach**.

Common sense – Invaluable when it comes to **developing workable legal solutions** which deliver practical business benefit for clients.

Sense of humour – The law is a demanding occupation, so the ability to take a **philosophical stance** is a valuable quality.

IT literate – Computers form the backbone of our organisation in managing casework, research and communicating with clients, so you should be **comfortable using office packages and the Internet**.

Previous work experience – We don't just take on new graduates in their early twenties. People from many professions convert to the law with us and find their previous experience a real asset.

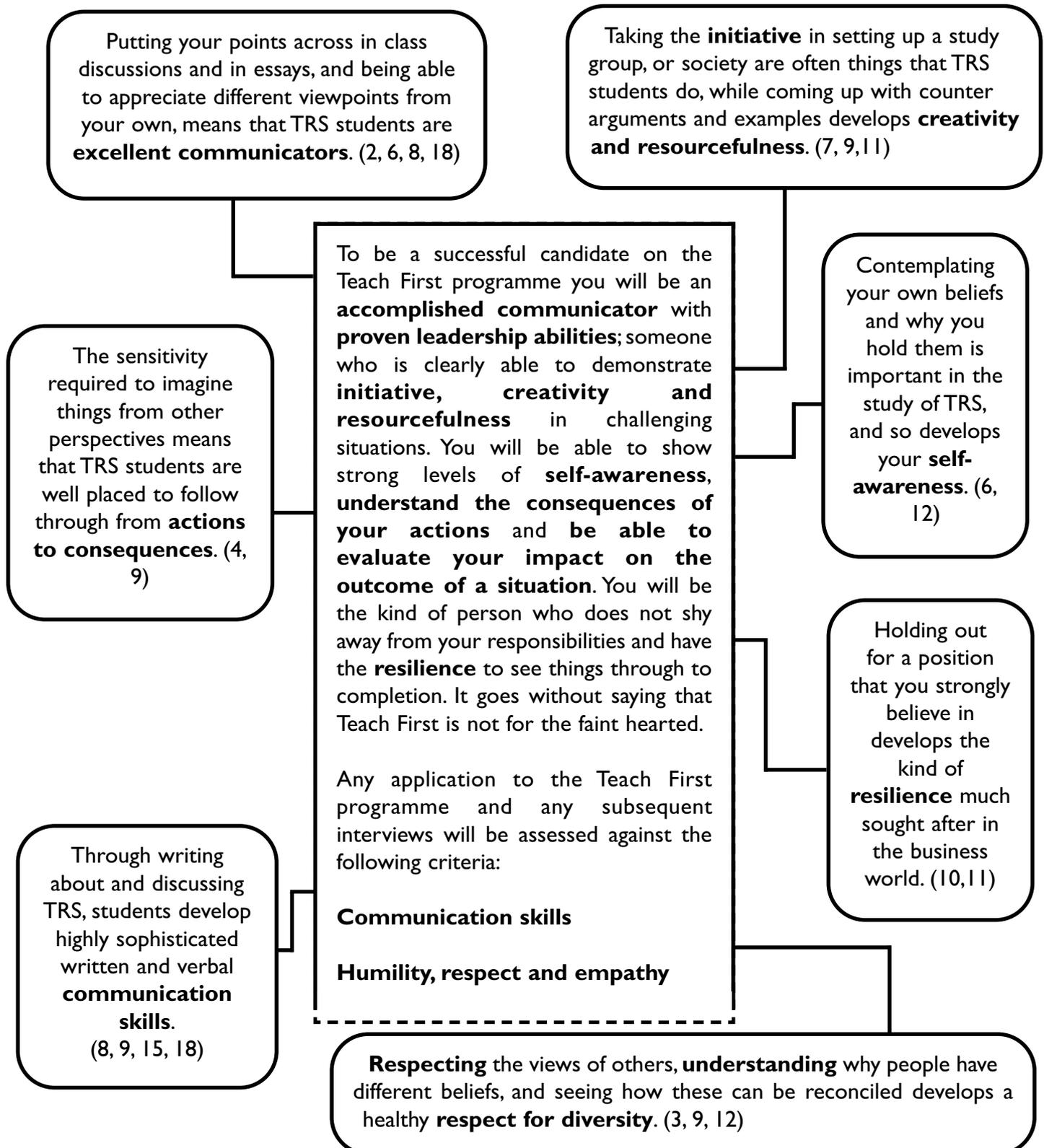
Critical analysis is another key aspect of studying TRS, particularly when writing essays. Similarly, **creativity** in coming up with new arguments is very important. (6, 9, 14)

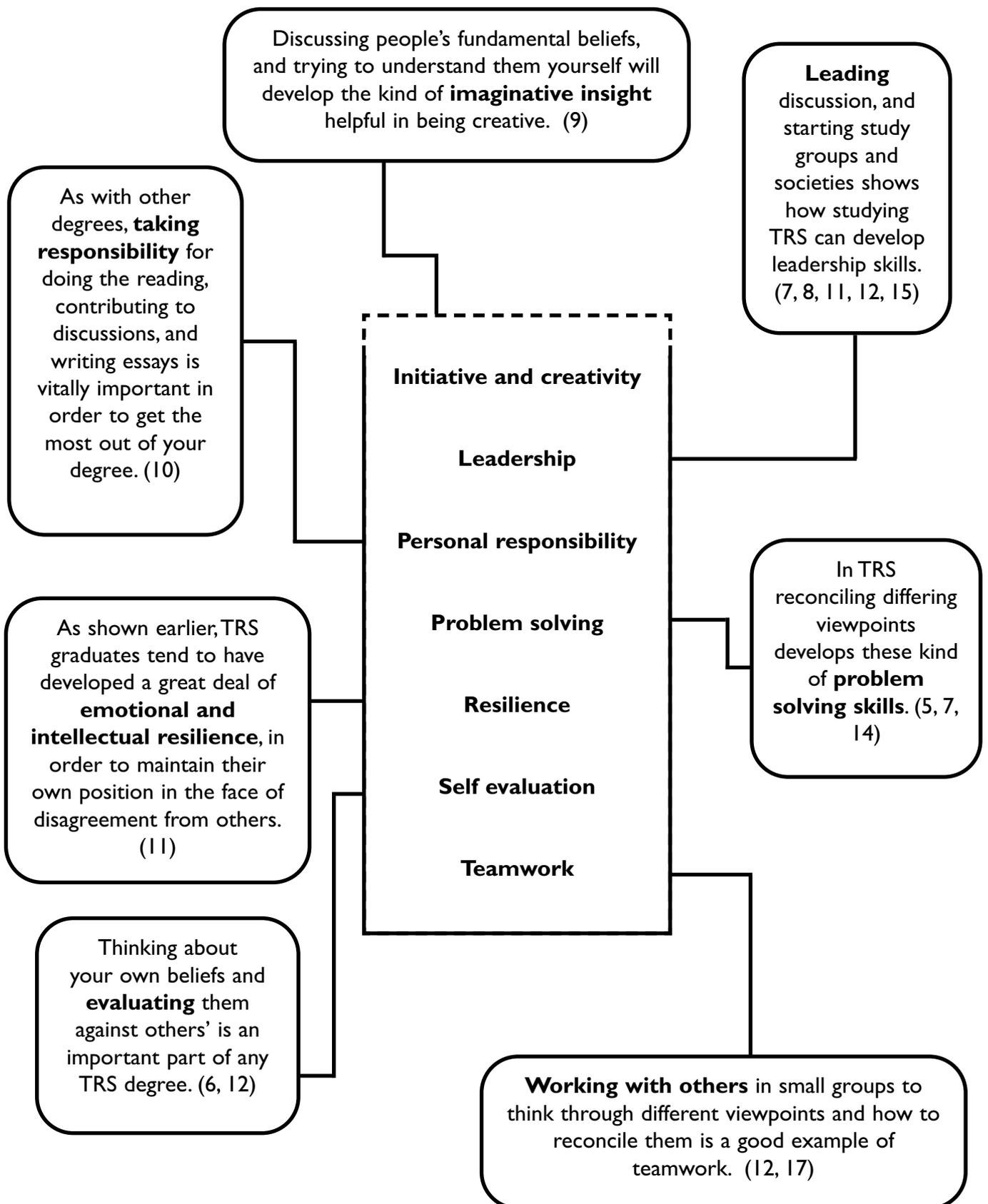
Learning to accept and work with others' views may require just the kind of 'philosophical stance' being talked about here. (1, 3)

Always remember that skills you have picked up outside the classroom, from for example **work experience**, social activities, volunteering and part time jobs, are often equally valued by employers.

Example 2: the Teach First programme

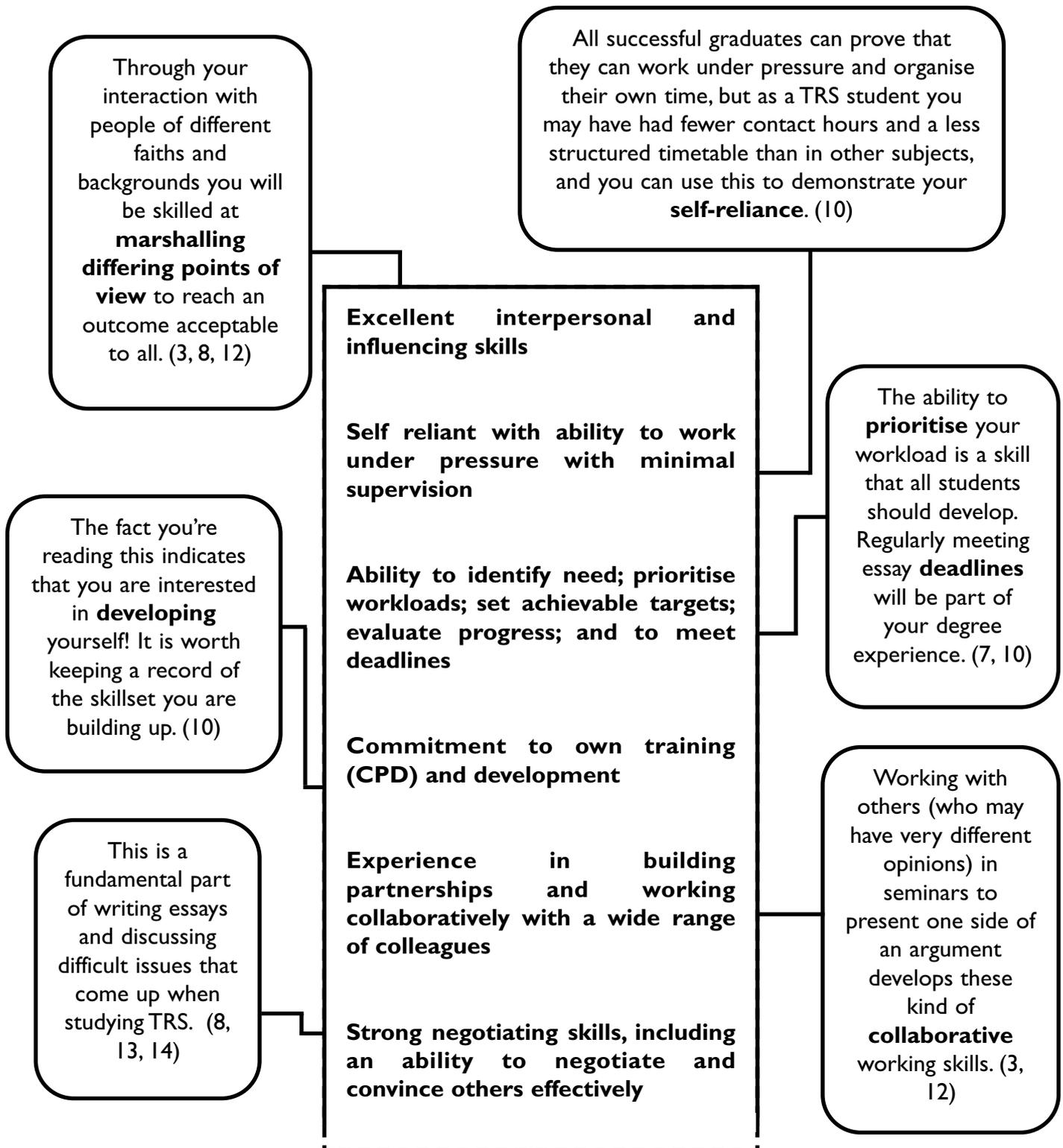
These criteria are given on the Teach First website as skills they are particularly interested in. Again, you can see that this programme requires very similar skills to the ones given in Section 2; generic competencies such as communication and interpersonal sensitivity (in the form of humility, respect and empathy), and personal capabilities such as creativity, initiative, leadership and teamwork.

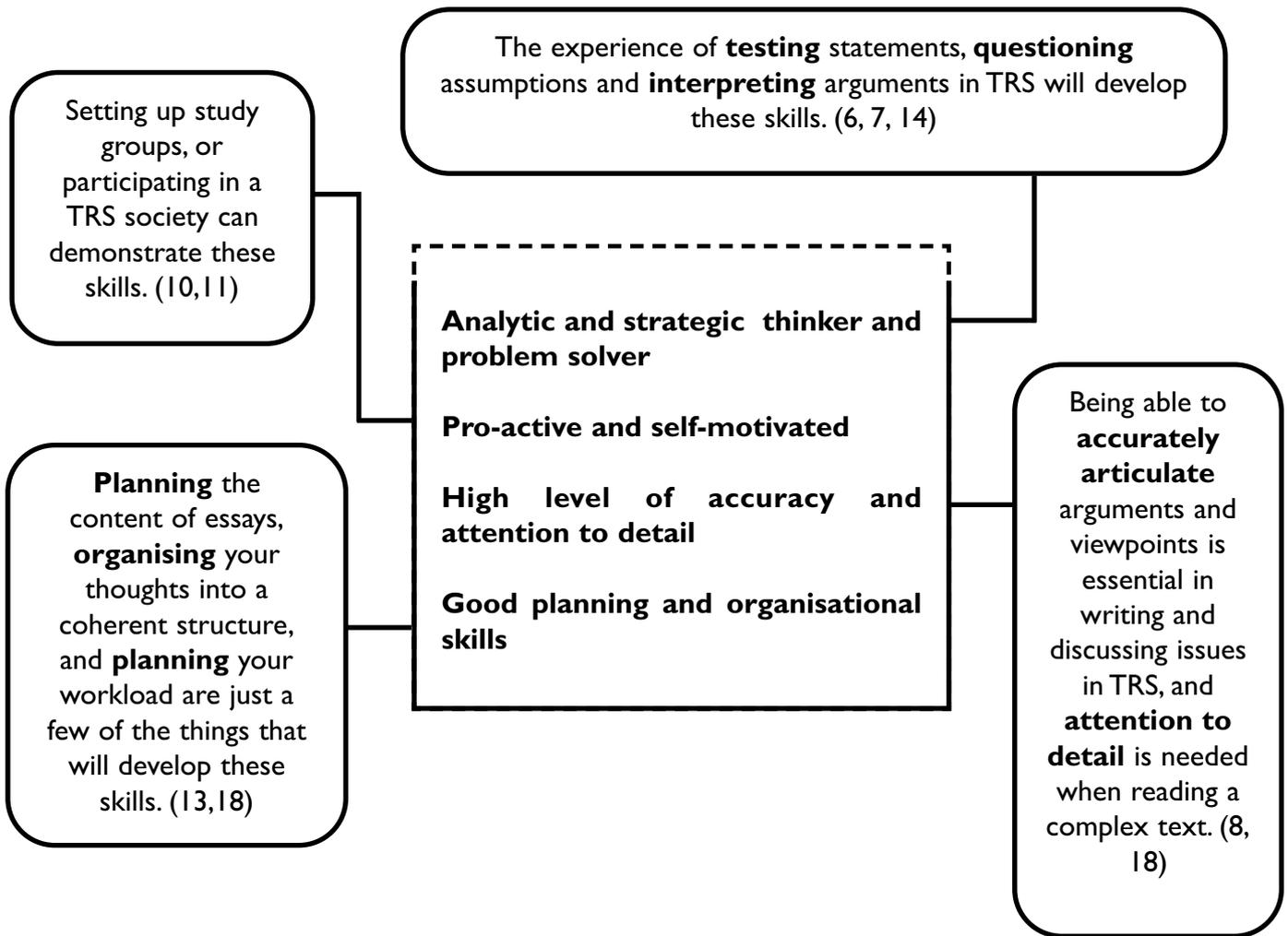




Example 3: best of the rest

In addition to the full sets of criteria above, we have compiled a collection of frequently used criteria that appear in a lot of job adverts and graduate training schemes. Each individual point is one that appears in an actual person specification, although we have drawn them from several different sources.





Interviews

Once you have applied for a job you will (hopefully) be asked to attend an interview. There are many resources already available about interview preparation, and you can find further information about these in Section 5: Resources. However, the activity of doing TRS instils a certain kind of self-reflectiveness that can be particularly helpful when thinking about interview situations.

Below are some sample questions and suggested responses that relate to the kinds of skills and attributes that you are developing by studying TRS, and that employers say they look for. We have not listed questions for every quality mentioned by employers in Section 2, but you can practice by applying the same kind of thinking to the other areas. The questions are necessarily broad, and, as with the example job criteria, are aimed at getting you to think about the kinds of responses you can give, taking into account the skills your degree is developing in you. The numbers in brackets below refer to the numbered Benchmark skills in Section 1.

Cognitive skills/brainpower

Planning and organising (7, 8, 10, 14, 15)



Can you tell me about a time when you had to plan a piece of work, and how you went about that?

If you wrote a dissertation this would be a good example of your planning skills, but essay-writing or even exam preparation could be used here as well. As a TRS student you will be particularly adept at organising your thoughts into a coherent structure and communicating this to others.

Generic competencies

Influencing (1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 14, 18)



Can you describe a time when you have had to persuade someone to change their opinion?

It should be easy to think of examples of when you have tried to persuade people to change their opinions; in tutorials and seminars you will have discussed topics that brought a variety of views, and you will frequently have been asked to defend your own, or even those of someone else, in order to persuade others to agree with you.



What do you do when you are right and others disagree with you?

This kind of question gives you an opportunity to demonstrate that you are capable of being persuasive and assertive without coming across as dogmatic or inflexible. The discussion of TRS in seminars will have given you lots of practice at remaining calm in the face of disagreement and coming up with a variety of points to support your claims, as well as probably having sometimes to agree to differ gracefully.

Communication (8,9, 15, 18)



Describe a presentation you have given.

What were you proud of/what would you do differently?

At some point in your degree it is likely that you will have given a presentation to your fellow students and tutor/lecturer, but even if you haven't been required to do so on a formal level you will still have experience of presenting your thoughts to others in seminars and tutorials, and you can emphasise the confidence you have gained from doing so.

Personal capabilities

Teamwork (3, 4, 17)



Describe a team that you have worked in

– what was your contribution?

Working in small groups with others in order to come up with a coherent argument to present to the rest of the class could be one example you use here. Alternatively, if you have helped to set up or run a study group or society you could use this experience to demonstrate how you can work well with others.



Give me an example when you have

worked in a team and had to persuade the group of your argument. Can you tell me what you did and what you learnt?

As above, there should be plenty of examples you can give of working in groups and using the kind of systematic, reasoned thinking that TRS encourages to convince others of your point of view. Reflect on the times that you feel such exchanges went well, and see if you can draw out some points that could be applied generally.

Leadership (3, 8, 9, 10, 11)



Can you tell me about a time when you

had to take on a leadership role?

Hopefully you will have led discussions in your classes, and you can use these instances to demonstrate skills such as drawing out others' opinions, ensuring that everyone got to contribute, making sure that the discussion stayed on topic, and that you came to a mutually acceptable conclusion.

Technical ability

Technical application (16)



Which software packages are you familiar with?

As part of your degree you will almost certainly have had to submit essays or coursework in printed form, and so are likely to be familiar with word processing software such as Microsoft Word. You may also have used PowerPoint to give presentations, and various different Internet browsers. If you have been involved in running a TRS club or society you might even have used spreadsheet and database software such as Excel and Access to keep track of membership and club fees.

Business and/or organisation awareness

Organisation understanding (13)



Why did you decide to apply to us for a position, and what do you expect to gain from working here?

Before the interview you should have used the research skills you have developed during your study in order to find out as much as possible about the organisation you want to work for, and the role you have applied for. Think in advance about how you can show that the skills you have match those required by the organisation you want to work for.

Practical elements – vocational courses

Image

This area is not one that is likely to come up in interview questions per se, but you should consider things like your appearance (i.e. dress smartly, make sure you are clean and tidy, arrive in plenty of time to avoid appearing flustered, etc.) so that you create the best possible impression. Again, you can find more information about pre-interview preparation in the further resources mentioned in Section 5.

4. Case Studies

Real life examples of TRS graduates' experience

These case studies are designed to get you thinking about where your degree might take you, not just for your first job but on into your future career. They give you a snapshot of two TRS graduates' experiences during and after university, with quotes in their own words taken from interviews with them, and show how careers can develop after leaving university, and how the skills and attitudes you develop whilst studying can continue to stand you in good stead long after graduation.

Julia – BA (hons), MA, Theology, University of Birmingham, 1984-1988

'Undertaking any degree course equips you with skills in organisation, discipline, and critical thinking. The whole experience of university life improves your social skills and offers opportunities to develop hobbies and sports that expand your confidence and help identify your preferred future direction.

For me, the specific gain from a theology degree was much more subtle and profound. I got a thorough training in ethical thinking. Another theology graduate recently described it to me as *a way of questioning that you never lose* and I think that sums it up really well.

Community Action

While I was at the University of Birmingham I got involved in Community Action, volunteering to support young people and the elderly in the locality. My degree studies came in useful here; particularly my exposure to, and understanding of, a wider culture of religions and religious/spiritual experience. This helped my understanding and tolerance of people, which is an advantage, especially living in a multi-cultural society.

This experience gave me a taste for community work and started me thinking about how communities engage with local services like health, education and other public services.

NHS graduate training scheme

After my MA, my experience of voluntary work helped me win a place on this scheme. It was a demanding role – at the age of 22 I found myself managing a £13 million budget. The social skills acquired as part of university living helped me prepare for presentations and teamwork. Like all NHS graduate trainees I got excellent mentoring support that enabled me to develop my confidence, and allowed me to make complex decisions early in my career, building on my critical thinking skills. I work for Walsall Primary Care Trust fundraising for a hospice development.

Business Manager in an NHS hospital

I spent five years as a Business Manager in a hospital, managing a medical unit. This involved administration and budgeting for this large unit.

My degree, like any arts degree, had given me the skills to stay with a task, organise my time and meet deadlines, which came in very useful in this role. Over this time I got further experience in staff training, purchasing, problem-solving and negotiation.

Senior Management in the NHS

Moving into a senior management role I took on more responsibility in the NHS, commissioning health services for local communities. This meant negotiating for services, arguing the need for particular support, meeting quality standards and working under considerable pressure.

Again I found myself involved in thinking about what's of benefit to a community, a thread that has run through my work since my early volunteer work at university. In this role I used the ability to reflect on my personal thought processes and ethical values in the light of philosophical thinking, which I had developed during my studies, to make my choices with a clear rationale.

In recent years I have applied this ability to make hard ethical choices to my working patterns. This has helped me develop working practices that meet job targets and to contain excessive work hours. I have since started sharing this approach with other managers to help improve their working hours. I believe that teaching managers to think about ethical dilemmas in the workplace can give them more scope for looking after themselves and their teams.

Freelance consultancy

This sharing of good practice led into my move into consultancy work. I am now the director of my own consultancy firm, offering freelance support and management cover for senior management roles in public services. I wanted to bring more balance into my life, and so I work four days a week doing consultancy, and take one day a week for volunteer work, taking time to pursue things I enjoy and encouraging others in the work place to do the same.

Looking back I would say my degree fitted me to work in the public sector. Theology focuses you outwards to others as well as inwards to self-reflection and these are qualities valued by the NHS and social care.

The greatest strength that theology has given me is possibly that of constantly questioning the givens of life. I once read a spiritual quote that said the author preferred theology graduates, because they had been made to look their beliefs in the face and make hard decisions despite that. This might not be the experience just from taking notes from lectures, but it is if you do the recommended reading, apply the questions put to you and think through the consequences. It was well worth the effort!

The greatest gain in my personal and professional life has been to have had the time and the discipline enforced upon me to think critically about the way in which I make personal decisions and how as a consequence I would wish to shape the way I act. From that has arisen the determination to act upon those beliefs. The result has been to make me steer my own career and life in a way I would never have critically considered without this ability to think from a well thought through personal viewpoint.'

Alan – BA (hons), MA Religious Studies, McGill University, 1977-1981

'When I decided to read religious studies, my friends and family thought the subject had considerable merit but they weren't too certain what sort of work it would lead to. My response was, it did not matter. It is a wonderful academic discipline and develops critical thinking.

I always thought following your interests, in my case a personal interest in comparative religion and philosophy, was all part of a proper and well-rounded education and that anything was, and is, possible as a result of a degree. I was correct in that belief. The degree is a wonderful preparation for the non-finance side of business.

Working with children with learning disabilities

I had worked with children with learning disabilities since I was sixteen. As a student working with young people with learning disabilities and people who were physically disabled, I learned that it was more important to support and accept people than to change them. It was this experience that helped me develop the openness and receptivity to others that I have used in my later roles.

Other courses

I did a third of an MBA degree out of interest, and did one year of a common and civil Law program (possibly my studies had taught me to think *too* critically as I subsequently withdrew from Law School after one year because I questioned legal thinking!).

Student recruitment and university management

I went on to work with extremely talented students in an internationally recognised Fine Arts School and in a University setting as Director of McGill University Residences.

MPA (Master Public Administration) Queen's University, 1983

Responsibility for administering student recruitment activities and managing staff encouraged me to pursue the Masters in Public Administration, which built on the presentation, risk assessment, negotiation and strategic thinking skills that I had acquired from my studies and previous experience, and taught me the importance of building strong teams around you that you can draw on for more technical legal and financial advice.

International development work at the University of Victoria

In this international role I took on a larger staff team and worked attracting gifts to the university. The work here relies on creativity – if you want to see a particular project attracting support you need to be flexible and open about how you reach your goal. I enjoy seeing things grow and am committed to the process all the way through. Certainly the degrees in religious studies have helped with my international work. I believe I am sensitive to other cultures, religions and philosophies.

Working in an international setting and getting people interested in the research activities of the University has made good use of my acceptance of a wide range of cultures and beliefs. Looking for areas of commonality between alumni and growing research and development activities involves clarifying areas of need and asking insightful questions. Most of this job involves building good relationships with people; these interpersonal skills, which are developed through the study of religion, are the foundation of development work.

Director of Development & Alumni Relations, UK University

This involves elements of relationship building and fundraising for research and development activities. The most enjoyable part of this job is working with people who are committed and interested in what they do. Fundraising and development work is very much about building relationships with people, listening to them and responding without judgement and being open to opportunities. Development work can be about helping people to realise their dreams. We may identify a need in society and match that with a gift that solves a particular problem. The appreciation and understanding that my degree gave me has helped my flexibility of thinking in my current role.

Reflections on my career path

My background has resulted in a fluid management style. I feel I am adept at weighing information and making hard decisions. I know how to ask questions which often go right to the heart of a matter, issue or problem. Given the right information, I can often create appropriate solutions to interpersonal and other complex problems. I feel that difficulties in the workplace often arise purely because of miscommunication.

I have certainly learned how to ask the right questions at the right time and I think this is key to self advancement and to making progress in business and basically getting on in life. For me, asking questions keeps life interesting. I think religious studies teaches you tolerance of other thoughts and people. It prompts you to be comfortable with uncertainty and impermanence (although perhaps those with a strong faith would argue otherwise). I am open to other people and ideas and this is the foundation to working with other people, which has been such a strong theme in my career to date.

5. Resources

Extra resources on the PRS website

We hope that you have found the information in this guide a helpful way to start thinking about employability. There are additional resources available on our website, at <http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/employability>, including project reports on Corporate Social Responsibility and self-employability in TRS.

Other resources

Here are some other sources of careers information that may be relevant as you make the transition from university to work, further study or other developmental opportunities. This information represents a starting point and we would strongly advise you to visit your own university Careers Service, which will have many additional sources of information and advice.

Prospects

This is described as the official graduate website and has a lot of useful information linked to job vacancies, postgraduate study and information on what graduates go on to do. There are also lots of useful resources on how to write your CV, tips for filling in job applications, and advice about interview techniques in the 'Jobs and Work' section of the site.

<http://www.prospects.ac.uk>

Milkround

This is a graduate careers portal for students and graduates, listing jobs on the site, and emailing relevant opportunities directly to those who sign up. It also has a useful 'News and Advice' section, containing profiles of different types of jobs, advice about job applications, covering letters, CV writing, psychometric testing, interviews etc., and interesting profiles of recent graduates now working for different companies.

<http://www.milkround.com/>

Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS)

The professional association of careers staff working in the sector. There are several useful resources in the 'Resources' section of the site.

<http://www.agcas.org.uk>

Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR)

The AGR is an independent, not-for-profit organisation dedicated to supporting employers in all aspects of graduate recruitment. They produce research surveys on graduate salaries, skills and other labour market information.

<http://www.agr.org.uk>

National Council for Work Experience

This site offers excellent links to schemes offering work experience, placement and year out opportunities.

<http://www.work-experience.org>

National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE)

The NATRE website includes a video called 'Opting for RS' which shows secondary school students reflecting on the skills RS gives them. It encourages general reflection on the sorts of skills which the study of TRS helps students to develop.

<http://www.natre.org.uk/explore/video.php>