Measuring SHAPE Graduate Outcomes: Policy Briefing

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This briefing is part of the British Academy's Understanding SHAPE Graduates toolkit. The toolkit presents newly commissioned research examining a wide range of data about SHAPE (Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts for People and the Economy) graduates, updating key statistics from the Academy's landmark quantitative report Qualified for the Future (2020), as well as exploring new questions related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. The data underpinning this research is available to explore as an interactive dashboard on the British Academy website, alongside a key findings highlighting our main takeaways.

This work is part of the British Academy's SHAPE Observatory, home of the evidence base through which the Academy monitors and communicates the health of the SHAPE disciplines.

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Introduction

SHAPE (Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts for People and the Economy) graduates develop vital knowledge and skills that support sectors across the UK economy. SHAPE skills, including amongst others analysis, critical thinking, communication and adaptability, are in high demand in the modern workplace.[1] SHAPE graduates are well-prepared to engage with the challenges facing the world, from climate change to the rise of AI, challenges that demand the knowledge and skills of SHAPE graduates alongside their Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) counterparts.

Yet, SHAPE disciplines continue to face a persistent challenge around perceptions of 'value'. They play a critical role in the UK's service-based economy, underpinning our social and cultural infrastructure and contributing significantly to public services: especially education, which is the most common sector of employment for SHAPE graduates.[2] But these activities, which should be central to our concepts of value, are often absent from mainstream debate. In the UK, the impact of higher education on individuals, the economy and society is assessed through a series of qualitative and quantitative data – such as graduate earnings, progression to further study, and satisfaction rates.

On these measures, SHAPE graduates perform well in aggregate: for example, 87% of SHAPE graduates were in employment in 2023, compared to 88% of STEM graduates.[3] Such data provide important evidence for our understanding of the role and use of higher education. But graduate outcomes data are, first and foremost, a short-term measure of our economy. They capture a snapshot at graduation and in the 15 months that follow. They do not, on their own, measure the inherent value of a degree taken. To be fully understood, data must be interpreted within their wider political and economic context.

To assist this, *Understanding SHAPE Graduates* is a toolkit which illustrates where and how SHAPE graduates contribute to the UK economy and society. The toolkit consists of an interactive data dashboard, a series of 'key findings' drawn from the data, and this briefing on the measurement of graduate outcomes.

This briefing provides essential context for interpreting the data in the *Understanding SHAPE Graduates* toolkit. It explores the complex political landscape surrounding debates on graduate outcomes and highlights the limitations in current datasets. These contexts are crucial for meaningful interpretation of both our analysis and for broader discussions about the value of higher education. This briefing is designed to help users better understand why policymakers are interested in graduate outcomes, why outcomes are commonly conceptualised in the way they are and to illuminate the limitations of existing tools. First, we explore why graduate outcomes data is a lens through which society evaluates returns to higher education, for both individuals and the public.

1 British Academy (2020) *Qualified for the Future*, p.4.
2 British Academy (2025) *Understanding SHAPE Graduates*.
3 Ibid.

The briefing then explores four policy challenges:

- How the policy landscape affects perceptions of graduate outcomes
- Challenges with common measures of graduate outcomes
- The datasets and their limitations
- How these issues impact our understanding of SHAPE graduates' career trajectories

By addressing these policy challenges, this briefing provides important context for any assessment of graduate outcomes data – including our own. An awareness of these broader considerations is vital when evaluating graduate success, regardless of discipline.

Finally, as well as assessing the current landscape, and what might be seen as the conventional approaches to measuring graduate outcomes, this briefing also makes the case that there is a need for alternative tools to better capture the full spectrum of graduate impact, including non-economic measures.

The returns to higher education

It is widely accepted that higher education provides both private returns to individuals and public returns to society, both financial and non-financial.[4] Policymakers, academics and other stakeholders often use quantitative measures of outcomes for graduates, what we will refer to generally as 'graduate outcomes', to understand the impact of higher education on individual graduates as well as society more broadly.

For example, there is considerable evidence of the positive returns higher education confers on individuals. Research has shown that graduates tend to earn more in their lifetimes on average, with a recent study estimating an average gain in net lifetime earnings of 20% for graduates compared to non-graduates.[5]

Numerous studies have also outlined the non-financial benefits of higher education for graduates, including that it can lead to improved health and wellbeing,[6] increased independence and new friendships and connections.[7]

Measures of graduate outcomes can also be used to examine the value of degrees in terms of public investment. In particular, the increased tax payments from graduates ensures public investment in higher education is more than recouped.[8] Meanwhile, graduates sustain the UK's public services, with universities expected to train 191,000 nurses and 188,000 teachers from 2021-2026.[9]

Beyond purely economic returns, studies have also shown that graduates are more likely to vote and to volunteer and less likely to commit a crime, as well as having better health outcomes.[10]

4 Willets, D. (2023), *How higher education can boost people-powered growth*, Resolution Foundation, p.5.
5 Britton, J., Dearden, L., van der Erve, L., Waltmann, B. (2020), *The impact of undergraduate degrees on lifetime earnings*, Institute for Fiscal Studies and Department for Education, p.8.
6 Hunt, T., Atfield, G. (2019), *The wider (non-market) benefits of post 18 education for individuals and society*, Warwick institute of Employment Research and Department for Education, pp.56-61.
7 Rasciute, S., Downward, P., Simmons, N. (2020), *Intrinsic versus instrumental benefits of higher education: the challenge from self-funded higher education*, *Applied Economics* 52(31) pp.3379–3390.
8 Universities UK (2024), *Impact of universities: in numbers: Who do universities b*, [3 June 2025].
9 Ibid.
10 McMahon, W. (2021), '*The External Social Benefits of Higher Education: Theory, Evidence, and Policy Implications*', *Journal of Education Finance* 46.4 pp.400-401.

How the policy landscape affects perceptions of graduate outcomes

Policy changes relating to higher education funding and regulation, as well as skills needs, all influence how graduate outcomes are perceived. In this section, we examine how the current policy landscape shapes public and policymaker understanding of graduate outcomes in the UK.

Future skills

There is ongoing debate about the rate of higher education expansion in the UK. While precise figures vary, it is generally agreed that higher education participation is approaching 50% of school leavers, the benchmark originally set by the New Labour government in the late 1990s.[11]

Nevertheless, the UK continues to face a greater problem of underqualified, rather than overqualified, workers,[12] and graduates are less likely to be overqualified in their roles than non-graduates.[13] Looking ahead, demand for higher-level skills, developed by graduates, is expected to grow further, especially in key sectors.[14]

There is broad consensus that skills and knowledge developed in higher education will be vital for the future of the UK economy.

Student Funding

In the UK, student finance is a devolved responsibility of the separate administrations in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

The tripling of tuition fees to £9,000 per annum in England in 2012 substantially shifted the cost of attending university onto the individual graduate. The maximum fee level has since been increased twice more – to £9,250 per annum in 2017 and again to £9,535 in 2024.

While Wales has followed England, with matching increases to the maximum fee, Northern Irish undergraduates pay up to £4,855 to study in Northern Ireland, whereas Scottish undergraduates do not pay tuition fees to study in Scotland.[15]

Partly as a result of these fee increases, there has been heightened scrutiny around ensuring that university provides good 'value for money' for individuals and that its benefits are commensurate with the greater financial investment graduates now make.

11 Brant, P. (2019), *It's not (yet?) true that half of young people go to university*, Higher Education Policy Institute; Bolton, P. (2024), *Higher Education Student Numbers*, House of Commons Library Briefing, p.17.

12 Ball, C. (2023), *Jobs for the Future*, Universities UK, p.14.

13 Henseke, G., Green, F. (2024), *Is England really the world champion in overqualification?*, Higher Education Policy Institute.

14 Costa, R., Liu, Z., McNally, S., Murphy, L., Pissarides, C., Rohenkohl, B., Valero, A ., & Ventura, G., (2023), *Learning to grow: How to situate a skills strategy in an economic strategy*, Resolution Foundation, pp.30-43.

15 While now out of date due to changes in the maximum tuition fee in England and Wales, alongside other changes, the following British Academy policy note explains broad differences amongst the four administrations' funding systems: British Academy (2023), *Student Funding Across the United Kingdom: tuition and maintenance in the four nations and the impact of inflation*.

However, the rising cost to government of student loans has also led to increased scrutiny on loan repayments. The government tracks the estimated cost of the student finance system – including student loan write-offs for graduates who do not earn enough to repay – through the 'Resource Accounting and Budgeting' (RAB) charge.[16] Importantly, because increased student fees impact the Public Sector Net Debt, this has influenced (and may in future drive) policy decisions around the sale of the student loan book.

Therefore, the specific nature of graduate outcomes in a monetised sense, and how this relates to graduates' ability to repay student loans over time, may play a significant role in future higher education funding models and broader policy debates.

Regulation

Following the Higher Education Research Act (2017), the Office for Students (OfS) became the independent higher education regulator for England. Higher education providers in England must register with the OfS in order to award degrees, use 'university' in their title, and for their students to access public student finance.

While the OfS is only the regulator for England and there are separate arrangements in place for the rest of the UK, the size of the English higher sector within the UK context means that the actions of the OfS arguably have an outsized impact on perceptions of graduate outcomes.

The OfS has the power to impose conditions of registration on providers. Its Regulatory Framework includes Condition B3, which states:

'[t]he provider must deliver successful outcomes for all of its students, which are recognised and valued by employers, and/or enable further study'.[17]

Successful outcomes are measured against the following criteria:

a) *Student continuation and completion.*

b) Degree outcomes, including differential outcomes for students with different characteristics.

c) Graduate employment and, in particular, progression to professional jobs and postgraduate study.[18]

In 2022, the OfS announced new minimum thresholds requiring 60% of students in each provider to be in 'further study, professional work, or other positive outcomes within 15 months of graduating'.[19] If this threshold is not met, the OfS may intervene and impose sanctions.

Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have separate regulators and funding bodies which operate differently to the OfS, with distinct responsibilities and powers. However, graduate outcomes are an important consideration across the devolved nations.

For example, the Scottish Funding Council's 2024 Outcomes Framework stipulates that universities should 'produce confident and highly capable work-ready graduate'. The Outcomes Framework sets out the Scottish Funding Council's funding requirements for colleges and universities.[20]

In Wales, the new tertiary education regulator, Medr, is in the process of developing a new quality framework, following the passing of the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022. The existing Quality Assessment Framework for Wales, which still applies, but is due to be updated following the creation of Medr, notes that the regulator will scrutinise student data including employment outcomes.[21]

16 Department for Education (2024), *Forecast Resource Accounting and Budgeting (RAB) charge, by loan product*, [3 June 2025].
17 Office for Students (2022), *Registering with the OfS*, [3 June 2025].
18 Ibid.
19 Office for Students (2022), *OfS sets new expectations for student outcomes*, [3 June 2025].
20 Scottish Funding Council (2024), *Outcomes Framework and Assurance Model*, [3 June 2025].
21 Medr (2025), *Quality*, [3 June 2025].

In Northern Ireland, higher education is regulated by the Department for the Economy. The Department's model for Quality Assessment also includes a consideration of employment outcomes.[22]

All regulators also have access to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)'s UK-wide Graduate Outcomes survey (discussed further below).

22 Department for the Economy Northern Ireland (n.d), *Quality Assurance of Higher Education*, [3 June 2025].

Challenges with common measures of graduate outcomes

While there are many potential measures of graduate outcomes, policymakers tend to consider it easier to measure empirical, observable data, such as graduate salaries, rather than complex, causal phenomena.[23] Examples of the latter include how graduates have used their degree-level skills to advance in their career, or other more intangible benefits of degree study, such as measures of social value and contribution to the common good.

This influences the types of measures most commonly used to understand graduate outcomes. In turn, these measures arguably have an important influence on how graduate outcomes are conceptualised in the context of the higher education policy landscape.

In this section, we examine common measures of graduate outcomes and explore some of their limitations.

Highly skilled employment

One common measure is whether graduates are in professional jobs, also commonly referred to as 'highly skilled employment'. This is defined as jobs that fall within three groups in the Standard Occupation Classification (SOC):

1) *managers, directors and senior officials.*
2) *professional occupations.*
3) *associate professional and technical occupations.*[24]

The OfS determines progression into 'highly skilled employment' as part of its regulation of higher education providers. This measure is also used in the Graduate Outcomes survey.

The rationale behind using this measure is that roles within this classification are considered 'graduate-level' jobs. These have been defined as roles that require employees to have the "knowledge and skills developed on a three-year university degree to enable them to perform the associated tasks competently".[25] Graduates in 'non-graduate jobs' can often be seen as 'overqualified', with poorly matched skills.

There are clear benefits to ensuring that graduates are well-matched in roles that they are trained for and that allow them to apply the high-level skills developed during their degree.[26] However, the merit of relying too heavily on 'highly skilled employment' rates as a measure of graduate outcomes has been questioned.[27]

23 Fryer, T. (2021), *What is a graduate outcome?*, Higher Education Policy Institute.
24 Office for Students. (n.d) *Registering with the OfS*, [3 June 2025]
25 Purcell, K., Elias, P. (2013), *'Classifying graduate occupations for the knowledge society'*, FutureTrack Working Paper (5) p.8.
26 Coyte, C. (2024), *Graduate employment: its limits in measuring the value of higher education*, Universities UK, [3 June 2025], p.7.
27 Ibid.

Several factors contribute to an overall critique of this metric, including that this categorisation can quickly become outdated as technological and labour market conditions evolve. For instance, SOC codes were last updated in 2020 and are unlikely to accurately reflect current job roles. These definitions do not account for changing and emerging skills needs, or what graduates themselves consider to be a good use of the skills developed during their studies.[28]

Salaries

Graduates' salaries are often used as a proxy for measuring graduate outcomes. In 2020, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) tracked the impact of degrees on lifetime earnings. The report found that, on average, men were £130,000 better off after attending university, while women were £100,000 better off, albeit with significant differences between subjects.[29] More recent research from the Resolution Foundation suggests that the 'graduate premium' on earnings remains but has slightly decreased in recent years. This is partly due to increases in the minimum wage, which has raised non-graduates' earnings.[30]

While salary data offers one important measure of outcomes, it should not be the sole consideration. A 2019 survey found that fewer than one-third of graduates cited higher salaries as a motivation for attending university. More common motivations included interest in their subject and a desire for new experiences.[31]

Another concern with relying heavily on salary data is that it can be affected by differential wage levels across the UK. A recent study suggested this might undervalue the contribution of graduates who choose to stay and work locally in the areas where they studied, rather than moving to areas with higher salaries, such as larger cities.[32]

Salaries also vary considerably by sector, and graduates who choose to work in lower-paid roles – such as those in the public or voluntary sector – should not necessarily be seen as having inferior outcomes to those employed in higher-paying industries.

This issue is explored further below in the context of SHAPE graduates, where it is clear that there is not one single direct causal link between degree subject and salary outcomes. Other factors – such as sex, ethnicity, disability and socio-economic background – also play a significant role.[33] In general, while higher education is associated with higher average earnings, and research suggests some causal effect, many other variables influence graduates' salaries. The size and nature of the effect of higher education on salaries vary significantly depending on a number of factors, both internal and external to higher education.

28 Ibid.
29 Britton, J et al. (2020), *The impact of undergraduate degrees on lifetime earnings*, The Institute for Fiscal Studies, pp.7-8.
30 Willets, D. (2025), *Are Universities Worth it? A Review of the Evidence and Policy Options*, Resolution Foundation, pp.18-20.
31 Universities UK and ComRes (2019), *Students and Recent Graduates Research*.
32 The Bridge Group (2021), *Staying local: understanding the value of graduate retention for social equality*. p.65.
33 Bolton P., Lewis, J. (2024), Equality of access and outcomes in higher education in England, House of Commons Library, pp.5-7.

Key datasets and their limitations

In the current policy context, measuring graduate outcomes relies primarily on three main datasets, each of which has their own limitations in generating a holistic picture of graduate activity.

Our toolkit uses two main datasets to build our picture of SHAPE graduate activity: the Labour Force Survey and the Longitudinal Educational Outcomes database. Both provide a long-term view of graduate activity, but both also have limitations.

The Higher Education Statistics Authority Graduate Outcomes Survey is also a vital dataset, however its relatively recent introduction, having started in 2017/18, means that it cannot be used for the type of longitudinal analysis that we have undertaken in this iteration of the toolkit, so we did not include it at this time.

In this section, we examine these datasets and their limitations in more detail.

Labour Force Survey

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is a UK-wide quarterly survey conducted by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to provide official measures of employment at a household level.[34]

However, for a variety of reasons, the LFS has experienced a decline in response rates in recent years, leading to increasing concerns over its ability to provide policymakers with reliable data, particularly since 2020.[35]

This has implications for interpreting the LFS data, particularly in assessing the outcomes of smaller groups – such as those with level 8 (doctoral) degrees – due to limitations in sample size.

Longitudinal Educational Outcomes

We have also analysed publicly available data from the Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) database in our toolkit.

LEO, developed by the Department for Education (DfE), contains information on the labour market outcomes of learners from schools, colleges and universities, and allows users to follow individuals through full-time education and into the labour market.[36]

LEO combines data from several sources, including the National Pupil Database, the University and College Admissions Service (UCAS) and the Longitudinal Individualised learner record, among others.

However, LEO does not distinguish between full-time and part-time work, so those who choose – or are obliged – to work part-time are shown to have lower earnings without additional context.[37] This particularly affects our understanding of female graduate salaries over time, as women are more likely to work part-time due to caregiving responsibilities.[38]

34 Office for National Statistics (n.d.) *Labour Force Survey*.
35 Francis-Devine, B. (2023), *Has labour market data become less reliable?*, House of Commons Library.
36 Department for Education (2024), *Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) data*, Transparent Data.
37 Universities UK (2019), *The uses and limits of Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data*.
38 Andrew, A., Bandiera, O., Costa Dias, M., Landais, C. (2024), *'Women and men at work'*, *Oxford Open Economics*, 3.1, pp.1294–1322.

Additionally, due to its reliance on pay-as-you-earn (PAYE) data, LEO faces challenges in accurately capturing the earnings of self-employed graduates.[39] The database also only covers England and does not include data from the rest of the UK, limiting its scope. Finally, the database does not include independent school pupils.

Graduate Outcomes survey

Finally, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) organises the annual UK-wide Graduate Outcomes survey. This survey replaced HESA's earlier Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey in 2017/18, following a full review in 2016.[40]

We did not use Graduate Outcomes survey data in our analysis due to its relatively recent introduction and the resulting inability to conduct longitudinal analysis at the time of writing.

Unlike the DLHE, which surveyed graduates 6 months after leaving university, the Graduate Outcomes survey is completed by 15 months post-graduation. This longer timeframe is intended to allow for more considered responses.[41]

Another welcome change is the inclusion of subjective questions on graduates' wellbeing, aiming to offer a more holistic view of graduate outcomes, alongside employment and salary data. As the survey continues to develop, further exploring questions of this type could be a useful way of broadening the scope of graduate outcomes data.

In a further recent development, HESA has introduced measures to capture whether graduates are in 'fulfilling work', developing and publishing a "non-monetary job quality composite measure" based on survey responses.[42] These innovations are designed to provide a more rounded picture of graduate outcomes.

Nonetheless, concerns remain. Response rates have declined – the most recent survey was the first to fall below a 50% response rate, reflecting wider concerns with similar survey-based data sources.[43] Further, despite the move to a 15-month window, the survey remains a 'snapshot' that captures outcomes at a single point in time, rather than tracking graduates over the course of their careers.

39 London Economics (2018), *Understanding the limitations of graduate outcome metrics in higher education*, p.5.
40 Universities UK (2024), Graduate employment: its limits in measuring the value of higher education.
41 Graduate Outcomes Survey (n.d.), *About the survey*, [3 June 2025].
42 Nathwani, T. (2023), *The value of a non-financial job quality measure in exploring graduate outcomes*, Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA), [3 June 2025].
43 Kernohan, D. (2024), *'There's a major problem with (the) graduate outcomes (survey)'*, *WonkHE*.

How these issues impact our understanding of SHAPE graduates' career trajectories

There are, undeniably, public perceptions that some SHAPE subjects may lead to less favourable graduate outcomes – based on the most common measures and datasets – than, for example, some STEM subjects. However, the data we have analysed presents a more complex and nuanced picture.[45]

In this section, we examine how the issues explored above regarding the measurement of graduate outcomes and the datasets used affect perceptions of SHAPE graduates and their outcomes. We also explore the potential for developing alternative measures and how these could improve understandings of graduate outcomes for all disciplines.

SHAPE graduates and graduate outcomes measures

Our analysis shows that SHAPE graduates have employment rates very similar to STEM graduates (as discussed above, 87% vs 88% respectively in 2023).[44] It is also notable that SHAPE graduates tend to have substantially higher employment levels and earnings than non-graduates.[45]

In general, and when aggregated, SHAPE subjects produce lower average earnings than STEM subjects. But, within these broad categories individual subjects and subject groups perform quite differently on salary metrics. For example, Medicine – often grouped within STEM – stands out with particularly high graduate salaries, especially for male graduates. Economics, a social science discipline within the SHAPE subjects grouping, also typically delivers strong financial returns.[46] By contrast, Creative Arts graduates tend to have lower lifetime earnings, often only slightly higher than those of non-graduates.[47] It is important to explore the broader context behind these outcomes.

Relatively lower-paid, but socially valuable employment is a common choice for SHAPE graduates. For instance, according to our data, education remains the most common employment sector for SHAPE graduates (including both first-degree graduates and master's level graduates), employing 22% of the total.[48] Many graduates may be motivated to teach by factors such as a passion for their subject and a desire to make a positive social impact. However, teacher salaries in the UK have experienced real-terms declines of up to 13% since 2010, reducing the graduate premium that this career path offers.[49] Yet few would argue that teaching is not a socially valuable and important role for graduates to fulfil.

44 British Academy (2025), *Understanding SHAPE Graduates*.
45 Ibid.
46 Britton, J et al. (2020), *The impact of undergraduate degrees on lifetime earnings*, p.7.
47 Wicklow, K., Gamble, D. (2024), *The Value of Creative Graduates*, UKADIA and GuildHE, p.9.
48 British Academy (2025), *Understanding SHAPE Graduates*.
49 Sibieta, L. (2023), What has happened to teacher pay in England?, Institute for Fiscal Studies.

As well as sectoral employment, certain working practices are more commonly adopted by SHAPE graduates. For example, arts graduates pursuing freelance careers in the creative arts sector often work part-time or are self-employed. As discussed above, both working patterns are difficult to capture accurately in labour market datasets, such as LEO, which can result in their earnings being underreported or misinterpreted.

Furthermore, some arts graduates may prioritise creative fulfilment over financial gain, which influences both their individual choices and the sector's overall pay levels – which are among the lowest in the UK.[50]

The wider value of SHAPE graduates

These choices – to prioritise social value, working practices, or creative fulfilment over financial return – are not unique to SHAPE graduates. Nursing, for example, offers a comparable path for STEM graduates to that of teaching for SHAPE graduates. The issue lies in the number of sectors which are popular with SHAPE graduates, where there are intersections between social and economic value and low levels of pay, as seen for example, in the creative industries, the Galleries, Libraries and Museums (GLAM) sector, education, hospitality and tourism. It is possible that long standing rhetoric around value has undermined the public perception of some of these sectors, perhaps even justifying cuts to arts funding for example and reducing opportunities to increase wages.[51]

It also raises a broader debate: should graduates prioritise non-financial returns, even when their education has been publicly subsidised and they are expected to repay some or all of that subsidy, either directly (through loan repayments) or indirectly (through taxation)? This leads to a more fundamental question underlying value: what is higher education for?

While traditional graduate outcomes measures – focussed on employment and earnings – have a place in the current landscape, there is also a clear need to broaden this perspective in order to fully capture the effects of higher education study, particularly for SHAPE graduates.

How can we measure the less tangible impacts of SHAPE degrees alongside their economic benefits? What is the social and cultural contribution of graduates, including those that work in the creative industries and the museums and heritage sector? How can we reflect the impact of SHAPE graduates on political and social cohesion, given that SHAPE disciplines offer insights into many of today's most pressing societal challenges? What about the intrinsic value of SHAPE degrees and the personal fulfilment graduates derive from studying subjects they are passionate about?

There is an imperative to develop alternative tools to measure graduate outcomes beyond the traditional focus on employment and earnings. Although this is by no means an easy task, previously discussed work to broaden the scope of questions in the HESA Graduate Outcomes survey demonstrates that there is appetite for new approaches. This may include metrics based on wellbeing, job satisfaction and social mobility.

The questions raised in this briefing demand reflection from government and wider society. Our analysis shines a light on issues in our current understanding of graduate outcomes and brings to the fore the strong existing evidence which justifies further work in this space. We call on the government and the sector to join us in a wider dialogue to consider these questions and find answers, to help provide a more holistic picture of graduate outcomes.

50 Wicklow et al, *The Value of Creative Graduates*, p.16.

51 Bloom, M., Bakhshi, H. (2020), *Graduate Motivations and the economic returns of creative higher education inside and outside the Creative Industries*, Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre.