
WHAT EMPLOYERS WANT



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FE Week

EMPLOYING A HOST OF APPROACHES TO LOOK AT 'SOFT' SKILLS

FE Week is the only newspaper dedicated to further education and skills

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Just what do employers want of prospective workers? What skills do businesses want them to have picked up and honed?

And further, where are we in terms of the levels of these skills and what are providers doing to deliver them?

In essence, the next five pages of this supplement seek to address these questions.

Firstly, on page three, the umbrella business groups of the Confederation of British Industry, the Federation of Small Businesses and the Local Enterprise Partnership Network were asked simply: 'What do your members want the FE and skills sector to provide learners?'

There were sector specific answers, but also wider requirements that are drawn out in research from Stemnet.

The new Precarious Futures report from the UK Commissioner for Employment and Skills (referred to in the Reed/NCFE advertorial below) examines the skills of young people in the UK and is on pages

four and five, where it is fully dissected by chief executive Michael Davis.

Outstanding providers feature on pages six and seven, outlining how they're providing such employability skills.

Employers themselves, and the efforts they make to develop employability skills, is covered on pages 10 and 11, before FE and skills-related members of the three main parties outline their views of employability skills on page 12.

The issue of certification of such 'soft skills' is looked at by NCFE chief executive David Grailey on page 13, before Ross Maloney, chief executive of Skills Show organisers Find A Future, discusses his experience of employer engagement.

Fintan Donohue, chief executive of the Gazelle group of colleges, puts across his experience of bringing the worlds of providers and businesses together on page 14, where Dr Fiona Aldridge, assistant director for development and research, National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, also looks at the need for understanding between employers and young people.

Finally, the

Association of Employment and Learning Providers, the Association of Colleges and the 157 Group discuss their views on employability skills on page 15.

Pictured front is 18-year-old Exeter College learner Jasmine Petry, who is doing a BTEC extended diploma in art and design.

She is pictured at the National Trust's Killerton House, in Devon, which has been working with the college's Centre for the Creative Industries to present a show featuring historic pieces from the Killerton collections as well as contemporary work by students and practising artists and designers.

The show, called The Nature of Fashion, opened at Killerton House on February 15 and was due to end on November 4.

The employer collaboration is one of a number run by the college to boost learners' employability skills.

See page 4



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Advertorial

ALASDAIR DOWNES
ALASDAIR DOWNES, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, REED NCFE

Think mindset — not just skillset

Research from the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) entitled Precarious Futures? focusses on the issues and barriers to sustained employment for young people.

It comes at a time when the UK economy is recovering, the governor of the Bank of England is indicating that low interest rates cannot last for ever and the housing market is buoyant.

Despite this good news it will come as no surprise that youth unemployment continues to affect far too many.

From February to April 2014, 853,000 young people aged 16 to 24 were unemployed — a drop of nearly 90,000 on the previous year.

This drop in the number of unemployed young people hides the true story though, with the UKCES report confirming that the ratio of youth unemployed to adult

unemployed has continued to grow since 1990, not only in the UK but across Europe.

The report comes at a time when young people out of work are facing even more challenges, with Prime Minister David Cameron seeking to remove the right to benefits for under 25s under a Tory government, and at the other side of the house Ed Milliband announcing last week that young people faced losing their means-tested benefits if they didn't "have the skills to get a job".

But what are the skills needed to get a job? The UKCES report identifies that while young people in the UK do rank poorly when it comes to skills such as literacy and numeracy, their research shows that employers are not always focussed on this academic point of view.

The research also identified that employers find it easier to employ young

people from college rather than school. This research mirrors that of James Reed, in association with Harvard University, into what employers really want.

This research identified that more than 97 per cent of employers will interview and recruit if the applicant can demonstrate the right mindset, for example trustworthiness, ownership, and flexibility, over their ability to demonstrate the right skillset. The REED NCFE partnership works with learners, via direct delivery of employability skills, jobs brokerage and a range of qualifications, to help young people develop and display the correct mindset skills; increasing their chances of being successful in being interviewed, recruited and retained.

Having worked to develop this mindset we then seek out those jobs within the hidden jobs market. Up to 75 per cent of jobs are never advertised, anywhere, and we work with local employers to identify exclusive access to these hidden vacancies to local learners, meaning we are able to offer solutions at a truly local level.

But how can we come together support our young people and move them into learning and training and then onto the world of work? At a time when the economy is recovering, the local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) undoubtedly have a key role to play in working with local communities and their colleges to inform

and advise on what the local economic needs are; there's little point in training an engineering workforce if your growth area is logistics.

Colleges too, play a key role in shaping the future of many young people, but they don't do so in isolation.

They need to work with Leps, local authorities, employers and many others to develop the right curriculum offer for students and the local economy.

Schools also need to examine their focus, as the participation age increases to 18 and young people seek out the advice they need to help them to find the right path. Developing relationships with their local colleges to ensure those pursuing a vocational path are given the right information and guidance to help them make good choices would seem to be a good place to start.

But it's not just schools and colleges who need to rethink their approach, parents need to be better informed as well. Too often they are helping their children make decisions based on their own experience from more than two decades ago.

Those in FE are at the coalface of helping our young people make the transition from learning into work, helping them develop the skills they need to follow their chosen career. It is only when we all work together that we'll see the results we all want, declining youth unemployment and a skilled, successful future workforce.

EMPLOYABILITY: DEFINING WORKPLACE NEEDS

Businesses have a range of requirements they want employees to meet that can vary depending upon the sector — but there are transferable skills that remain the same irrespective of the nature of the workplace.

London-based Stemnet (Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics Network) has carried out a survey of a range of employers that has boiled these down to 10 key skills.

It lists communication skills as first and among the other nine are working under pressure and to deadlines, and negotiation skills.

Such skills need to be given real importance at school, for Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) national chairman John Allan.

"Small businesses want to see employability and personal skills embedded in everyday teaching and schools must focus on the outcome of this alongside academic results," he said.

"To keep up with the pace of change in the world of work, young people need to know about business; what the workplace expects of them and how to pursue careers that suit their skills and aspirations. Half of FSB members believe that young people lack a good attitude to work as well as other skills such as problem solving and communication skills.

"Many small businesses are keen to play their part to help improve employability skills and to teach young people about business and the workplace. This is not just through providing work experience or giving a careers talk, as useful as these are. Our members are involved through Young Enterprise, they sit on school governing bodies, and many volunteer with homework and reading support."

Neil Carberry, CBI director for employment and skills, said: "Employers need young people with skills in self-management, team working, business and customer awareness, problem solving, communication, application of numeracy and application of information technology.

"Among graduate recruits, employers report least satisfaction with levels of self-management, problem solving, and most of all, business and customer awareness (CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Survey, 2013).

"To encourage the development of these attitudes and aptitudes for the workplace, the FE and skills sector must improve business-engagement. The best way to develop a deeper understanding of the requirements of the world of work is exposure through work experience, through 'real-world' projects and exercises,

STEMNET'S TOP 10 EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS



- 1 COMMUNICATION AND INTERPERSONAL SKILLS**
EXPLAINING WHAT IS MEANT IN A CLEAR AND CONCISE WAY THROUGH WRITTEN AND SPOKEN MEANS. LISTENING AND RELATING TO OTHERS, AND ACTING UPON KEY INFORMATION/INSTRUCTIONS
- 2 PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS**
UNDERSTANDING A PROBLEM BY BREAKING IT DOWN AND IDENTIFYING KEY ISSUES, IMPLICATIONS AND THEN IDENTIFYING SOLUTIONS. APPLYING KNOWLEDGE FROM MANY DIFFERENT AREAS TO SOLVING A TASK
- 3 USING YOUR INITIATIVE AND BEING SELF-MOTIVATED**
IDEAS THAT CAN BE REALISED. DRIVE AND NOT WAITING FOR INSTRUCTION
- 4 WORKING UNDER PRESSURE AND TO DEADLINES**
COPING WITH STRESSFUL DEADLINES AND MEETING THEM
- 5 ORGANISATIONAL SKILLS**
BEING ORGANISED AND METHODOICAL. PLANNING WORK TO MEET DEADLINES AND TARGETS. MONITORING PROGRESS TO ENSURE THE MEETING OF DEADLINES
- 6 TEAMWORKING**
WORK WELL WITH OTHERS FROM DIFFERENT DISCIPLINES, BACKGROUNDS, AND EXPERTISE TO COMPLETE A TASK OR GOAL
- 7 ABILITY TO LEARN AND ADAPT**
ENTHUSIASM FOR WORK, AND IDENTIFYING WAYS TO LEARN FROM MISTAKES
- 8 NUMERACY**
USING DATA AND MATHS TO SUPPORT EVIDENCE OR TO DEMONSTRATE A POINT
- 9 VALUING DIVERSITY AND DIFFERENCE**
KNOWING THE VALUE OF DIVERSITY AND WHAT IT CAN BRING. CONSIDERING THE DIFFERENT NEEDS OF DIFFERENT INDIVIDUALS
- 10 NEGOTIATION SKILLS**
TAKING ON BOARD OTHERS' FEELINGS AND EXPRESSING REQUIREMENTS IN AN UNEMOTIONAL CLEAR FASHION TO ACHIEVE MUTUAL SUCCESS



Source: Stemnet [www.exeter.ac.uk/ambassadors/HESTEM/resources/General/STEMNET%20Employability%20skills%20guide.pdf]

and through properly informed careers guidance."

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills 2013 skills survey gave further indication of how these transferable skills were lacking, as explained by Alex Pratt, chair of the management board of the Local Enterprise Partnership (Lep) Network and chair of the Bucks Thames Valley Lep.

He said: "Speak to any two businesses or any two of the 39 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)

and you will find very different views on the state of the local supply of skills, yet a consistent uniform understanding that economic and business growth are heavily dependent on workforce capabilities and attitudes.

"As far as the facts go, the rich and informative UKCES Employer Skills Survey tells us the skills identified by employers as most commonly lacking among job applicants are technical, practical or job specific skills (62 per cent), oral and written communication skills (42 per cent), and customer and problem-handling skills (41 per cent).

"For existing employees they are technical, practical or job specific skills (57 per cent), planning and organisation skills (57 per cent) and team-working skills (53 per cent).

From left: John Allan, Neil Carberry and Alex Pratt



"It makes perfect sense that in such a rapidly changing world, on the job practical and technical learning never stops. Equally, it should be no surprise that to thrive in most jobs you need to be able to communicate, think for yourself and contribute to solving problems.

"Interestingly, big differences exist between Leps, which shows why local specificity is important. Leps can play an important role in matching employer demand and needs to provision at the level of the firm.

"Most employers are broadly happy with the product of our schools, colleges, and universities and we also acknowledge our own key role in staff development, so we are building on excellence here not throwing our hands up in disgust, despite concerns at the margins as to the literacy, numeracy and attitude of a significant minority."

New UKCES report highlights early experience of job environment

An early taste of the workplace is vital for young people to “develop the rounded set of abilities and experience that employers need” — that’s the simple message of a new report from the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES).

The report, shared with *FE Week* ahead of its scheduled release of Tuesday, June 24, runs to more than 20 pages and examines youth unemployment in the UK, looking at how work experience opportunities can help deliver key employability skills.

Fiona Kendrick, UKCES commissioner and chief executive and chair of Nestlé UK and Ireland, wrote the foreword to the report, called *Precarious Futures*.

“More and better access to the workplace is at the heart of tackling youth unemployment,” she said.

“This is vital to develop the rounded set of abilities and experience that employers need, and combining earning and learning is the best way of achieving this.

“Every country which has more young people earning and learning than the UK, whether through apprenticeships or combining part-time work with education, has lower unemployment rates later on. Small jobs make a big difference.”

She said international comparisons for young people in the UK showed “clear scope to improve vital literacy and numeracy skills”.

However, she added: “These skills are necessary to improve young people’s chances — but they are not sufficient. The importance of giving young people access to the workplace, allowing them to gain the skills and experience that employers need, cannot be understated.

“In essence, this report contains one simple message: genuine experience of the workplace is vital for young people. As a

result, small jobs make a big difference to young people’s chances of securing work, starting careers and progressing within them.

“Businesses and different kinds of educational institutions all have a role to play, with the role of government being to create the conditions for these collaborations to succeed and become sustainable.”

Ms Kendrick goes on to set out three “ideas for improving the UK’s approach to young people and youth unemployment”.

She called for all young people to get a balance of work and education, “with a focus on combining part-time work with study for those not on apprenticeships.” She said, secondly, that there “needs to be an expectation that significant and meaningful work experience forms an integral part of all study programmes — this includes academic as well as vocational programmes”. And thirdly, she said “to create stable and meaningful vocational pathways for young people we also need far greater employer ownership and responsibility.”

She added: “The UKCES Employer Ownership Pilots have gone some way to both encourage and enable leadership and collective action by employers via industrial partnerships: voluntary coalitions of leading employers, trade unions and delivery partners.

“These pilots demonstrate that employers have the ambition and the will to tackle some of the challenges young people face. We also want to see this kind of leadership and collective action taking place at the local level.”

The report was the fourth in a series from the UKCES on the labour market for young people following *The Youth Inquiry from 2011*, *The Youth Employment Challenge*



UKCES commissioner Fiona Kendrick

from 2012 and last year’s *Scaling the Youth Employment Challenge*.

The latest report is made up of three chapters which look at young people in the labour market, the skills of young people and work experience and earning and learning.

The summary to the first chapter, which draws on European figures from Eurostat for 15 to 24-year-olds who are not in education, employment or training [see figure 1], reads: “Recent falls in youth unemployment are welcome and our international position is close to the average.

“However, when looking at countries

with similar levels of adult unemployment as the UK, our youth unemployment rate is significantly higher than would be expected. There are long-term and deep-rooted challenges hindering young people’s movement into work, and while these may not be unique to the UK they certainly seem more acute here than in other countries.”

The second chapter looks more into employee skills and draws on research from the UKCES Employers Skills Survey from last year [see figure 2].

“The majority of employers ... find their young recruits well prepared for the world of work — but there is a significant minority that don’t, including over a third

of employers recruiting 16-year-olds straight from school,” according to the report.

“In line with the international evidence we would expect these employers to cite literacy and numeracy skills as key reasons for poor preparedness. This is not the case. Instead, these employers overwhelmingly cite lack of experience and poor attitude.

“Just under a quarter of those taking on 16-year-olds from school say that their recruits lack work experience (23 per cent) and have a poor attitude or lack motivation (18 per cent). And in sharp contrast to international findings, the share of employers who find recruits from education lack

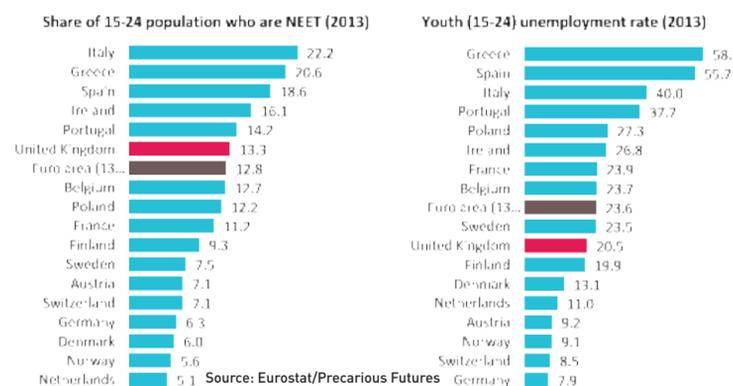
Figure 1

Share of employers recruiting from education who find them poorly prepared and for what reason (base: employers who have recruited from each of the categories)

	16 year olds from school	17 or 18 year olds from school	17 or 18 year olds from FE College	HE
Lack of working world / life experience or maturity	23%	18%	14%	8%
Poor attitude / personality or lack of motivation	18%	15%	11%	5%
Lack required skills or competencies	10%	9%	7%	5%
Lack of common sense	6%	4%	3%	2%
Literacy/numeracy skills	4%	4%	2%	1%
Poor education	3%	2%	1%	1%

Source: Precarious Futures

Figure 2



literacy or numeracy skills is tiny, ranging from 4 per cent for those taking on the youngest school leavers to 1 per cent of those taking on graduates.”

The third chapter considers how the UK performs in providing work experience, and said: “Experience of the workplace is fundamental.

“Many of the countries that have better labour market outcomes for young people than the UK are also far better at providing access to the workplace during education, through work experience and opportunities to earn and learn (including apprenticeships as well as combining part-time work with full-time study).”



MICHAEL DAVIS

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE UK COMMISSION FOR EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS

Transferable skills for young people: a team effort

“Applications are now open. Candidates must have: sound organisational skills, good written and oral communication, effective time management, good teamwork, and a positive attitude...”

We’ve all seen this generic job description; the words blurring together on a page, the meaning behind them escaping us slightly.

These words, clichéd as they are, form the universal language of recruitment. Young people in the UK learn this language at an early age, but do they actually develop the real-life skills behind the words?

Our new report, *Precarious Futures? Youth employment in an international context*, draws on extensive research

into the views of employers and explores why young people in the UK face such significant barriers to employment compared with other countries.

An intuitive explanation for high levels of youth unemployment is inadequate skills. In fact, two recent international studies support this to some extent. According to the Programme of International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) and the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA), young people in the UK rank between poor and average in literacy, numeracy, technology problem solving and science skills.

However, *Precarious Futures* shows the problem is more complex than this. In fact, most employers are very happy with their

youngest recruits.

Interestingly, employers are usually happier with college leavers than they are with school leavers of the same age. When they aren’t, it isn’t because young people lack adequate literacy and numeracy, it’s because they lack experience of the workplace or, on a smaller scale, because they aren’t considered to have the right attitude for work.

In other words, our young people aren’t always developing the transferable skills they need to function productively in the working world. These skills can’t be taught on a whiteboard — they are cultivated through sustained and stimulating experiences of the workplace.

This is not to say that literacy and numeracy skills aren’t important. But

the fact is that they are not in themselves sufficient to enable young people to make the transition from education to work. Access to the workplace is often the missing link.

The international comparison in *Precarious Futures* shows that there are different ways to ensure young people get access to work. One way is through ‘earning and learning’ — that is, combining paid work with study — either informally by taking up part time jobs alongside study, or formally via apprenticeships. Small jobs make a big difference; they help young people to develop the skills employers value. However they are declining in availability.

Another way is to integrate work experience into all vocational study

programmes. This will allow students to experience the pressures of real work environments and learn the need to prioritise multiple tasks, to be commercially aware, and to exercise professional conduct.

Work experience also allows students to build networks with employers. Word of mouth is now the number one recruitment method, particularly with small businesses, and so it is fundamental that young people make these links.

Getting more and better work experience for young people is dependent on employers working together with local schools, colleges and universities. UKCES paper *Not Just Making Tea: Reinventing work experience*, found many great examples of employers collaborating with

education to give young people experience of work. In *A New Conversation: employer and college engagement*, UKCES, the 157 Group and Gazelle Group of Colleges look at how employer-college collaboration in particular can become more widespread. Encouraging progress is being made but the UK still lags behind our international counterparts when it comes to young people getting the experience they need.

To go back to our cliché: improving the transferable skills of young people in the UK will be a team effort, requiring communication, organisation, and a positive attitude. However, to ensure students develop well-rounded experience and to ease the transition from education to work, more and better collaboration between employers and education is vital.

Outstanding views on workplace skills

Colleges and independent learning providers are working to deliver employability skills through a number of initiatives.

Here a selection of these providers give their view of what employers want and what they're doing to meet that demand.

Mike Phelan, director of skills and business development at Blackpool and The Fylde College

We recognise that employability skills are a fundamental part of every course and, as such, these skills are embedded into each curriculum area.

We work extensively and very successfully with a wide range of employers and agencies to identify current and future local skills needs. For example, the college works very closely with employers working in the visitor economy, in aeronautics and in construction to identify what employers need and prepare learners successfully for jobs in these areas.

Further examples include Build Up, a dedicated training facility that provides courses which enables learners to develop effective employability skills within the construction industry. Learners develop an appropriate work ethic, which is valued by employers who use Build Up as their first choice to look for potential employees. They have placed more than 3,500 students into work to date.

Many learners win national or international competitions and gain prestigious awards, which help them in their applications for employment.



For example, learners in catering and hospitality have had success several years running in the national Nestle Toque D'Or competition.

The college's Tourism department has recently announced a training partnership with Thomas Cook and Co-operative Travel to exclusively supply students for work placements in local retail travel stores.

Public services students have just come back from an Army 'Look at Life' residential where they took part in training exercises and experienced typical life at an army barracks.

Creative Media students have produced a music video for a local songwriter which will be marketed through iTunes.

Artwork displayed around the campus link Maths and English to the specific career areas to make it relevant for each student.

Teachers use their vocational experience to teach lessons in an industrial context and plan a range of activities which develop learners' employability and work-related skills, such as visits to workplaces, visiting speakers and periods of work placement.

James Wilmot, recruitment coordinator, Business Enterprise Centre, Weston College

There is no secret recipe for what makes a good employee — the formula is remarkably simple. Weston College engages with hundreds of local and national employers at all levels and our employers all look for the same attributes — interest, enthusiasm, resilience, the ability to learn, the ability to take guidance. Experience is important for some, but not all.

We make it our business to understand what employers want from their employees. We listen to what they want and support our learners to develop these skills and attributes.

Some of our learners already have all the employability skills they need. They might just need a push in the right direction to find the right vacancy for them. Others need a little more help and through one-to-one intervention, we can identify what help they need and provide that help through our range of pre-employment courses.

These include group workshops, team projects, work experience, mock interviews, functional skills, CVs, support from employer mentors, personal & social development.

We fill 20 to 30 apprenticeships per month and see 125 adults per month for career advice. Attendance across all pre-employability course is 90 per cent, way above the national average of 53 per cent on similar courses. Success rates are currently between 98 and 100 per cent, again well above the national benchmark on similar courses.



Dale Stewart, Walsall College's Job Shop and employability team leader



We deliver bespoke employability courses which are designed to meet the needs of the student and respond to growth sectors and trends in the labour market.

This employability training is delivered over a two-week period and enables students to develop new skills so they have all the tools they need to be successful at the interview stage.

These skills could include interview techniques, CV writing, company presentations and even background information about a particular business.

Once completed, the college's employability team match the candidates to local jobs and support them with work experience, apprenticeships or skilled vacancies.

Developed with employers and Jobcentre Plus, this model has been extremely successful and has placed local people into sustainable jobs with companies including Beefeater, Premier Inn, Aspray 24, Ikea, East End Foods, JTF, Secure Pro, Amazon and Maybrook Platinum Care Services.

We have an excellent relationship with Jobcentre Plus and work with them to develop new skills conditionality programmes depending on growth sectors and where there are gaps in the market.

They refer large numbers of jobseekers on a weekly basis and by completing our tailored courses these local people have the best possible chance of finding work.

This year Walsall College has placed 558 people on employability courses as well as between 50/60 each month on the 'Roll on - Roll off' skills conditionality courses which started in January. These courses include security, door supervision, forklift truck training and care 2 make a difference.

Dr Alison Birkinshaw, principal of York College

Like most principals, I talk with employers on a daily basis. As chair of the Further Education Reputation Strategy Group I am also aware of the research we sponsored into this area. Fundamentally, employers — or businesses as they prefer to be called — want their local college to be successful.

Directors of local businesses are part of their community. Their children attend local schools and colleges, and they employ local people. It goes without saying they want their children, family members and employees to have access to consistently high quality education and training whatever their age.

They want their local college to be financially healthy, and to ensure that strategic decisions are made which will benefit students and

the local community. They don't want a 'badge' to show their college is excellent, and they don't want competition between providers.

They just want their local training providers or college to 'stop talking and start doing' as one hotel manager said to me.

But the reality is that funding restrictions and other 'red tape' make it really difficult to respond to employer need quickly. My sense is that this is going to get worse not better when the new apprenticeship Trailblazers become the norm.

But as always we will work creatively with local businesses to make sure we understand what they want and when they want it and do our utmost to provide it."



QA Apprenticeships spokesperson



QA Apprenticeships celebrate having won the Programme of the Year title, with Cappgemini, for the third year running at the Learning & Performance Institute awards in February. Pictured left is awards host and television news presenter Natasha Kaplinsky

We pride ourselves on the calibre of candidates we provide to employers in the UK that has resulted in more than 4,000 apprentices being placed with more than 1,000 UK employers.

With more than 94 per cent of QA apprentices going on to permanent roles, the employers they work with are clearly enjoying the business benefits.

Prior to being sent to an employer

for an interview, all applicants are pre-screened through QA via one-to-one interviews and recruitment days — which includes teamwork exercises and aptitude tests — to test their employability skills.

Once a QA apprentice starts their programme, we ensure around 75 per cent of all apprenticeship training takes place in the first six months of their programme — this boosts an apprentice's productivity faster

within the workplace.

The first few weeks are very important in ensuring the apprentice is settled and progressing in their role.

QA runs inductions to highlight what is expected from an apprentice which includes videos on appropriate workplace behaviour, exercises on how to deal with potentially tricky workplace scenarios and self-management and organising skills.

Rob Bosworth, assistant principal at Exeter College

We embed employability skills in the curriculum using the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning mantra of 'Line of Sight'.

Such specialist vocational courses are co-designed with employers, delivered actually in the workplace or as close to it as possible, and the vocational lecturers have up to date specialist industry expertise.

Examples of the many

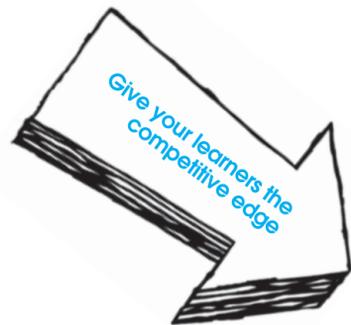
initiatives include aerospace engineering where students complete 1,580 hours of practical experience in the Flybe hangars and training workshops, theatre productions at the Exeter Barnfield Theatre, and Art and Design shows at the National Trust's Killerton House.

Students receive a rich and varied programme of work experience blended with credible and purposeful qualifications enabling employability skills to be contextualised to the career they aspire to.

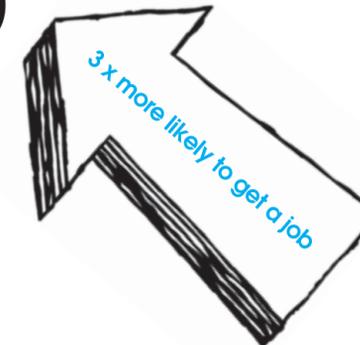


Exeter College learners Paul Atterbury (front), aged 24, and Robert Allum, 21, are on NVQ2 Performing Engineering Operations (FdSc Aircraft Engineering) and thanks to an employer engagement initiative, they get to work with Flybe aircraft

***All general further education colleges and independent learning providers to have been awarded a grade one result from Ofsted under its current common inspection framework were approached to take part.**



●●● you've got the job



Survey after survey reports that employers continue to be frustrated by the lack of work readiness displayed by many young people, e.g. lack of work experience, self-management or problem solving skills. REED NCFE are working with partner colleges to challenge these issues, through our range of qualifications and jobs brokerage service.

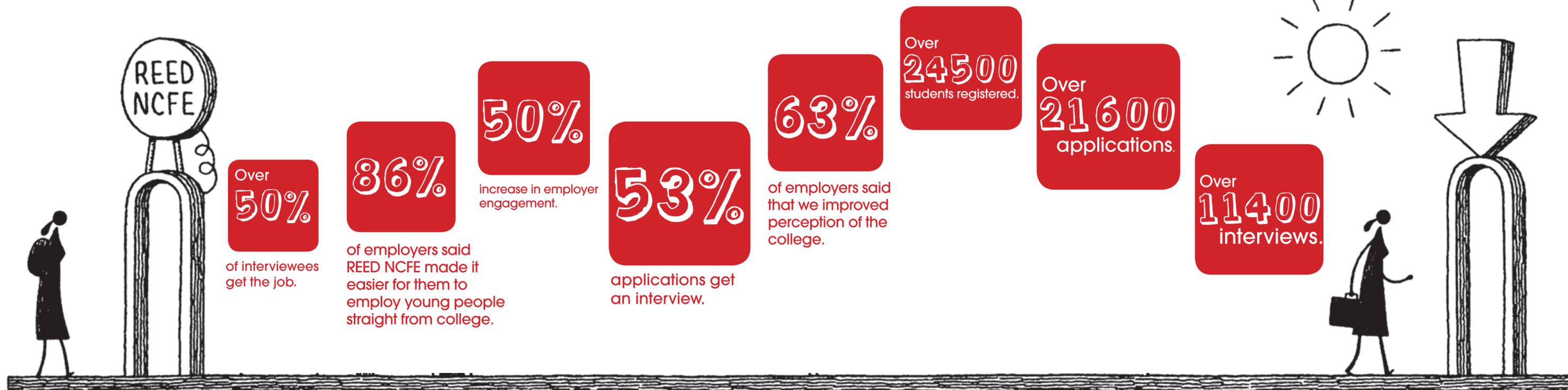
We have already delivered thousands of employment outcomes in colleges across the UK, helping to position them as the 'go to' partner for the

local business sector to get great job ready people. We have done this by helping students access potential employers in the hidden jobs market. It is often frustrating for job seekers that only around one out of four vacancies are ever advertised. We have tackled this by setting up on site Job Zones with colleges, targeting the 75% of vacancies which are never advertised and matching them to local students through tailored interventions.

Research, in association with Harvard, has shown that 97% of employers will

recruit on mindset over skill set – the REED NCFE Job Search qualifications suite tackles this with learners, helping them to appreciate the importance of mindset and identifying ways that they can evidence this in their application and interview.

At REED NCFE our priority is to work with you to support learners from learning into work, in these still challenging times what can be more important than that?



Businesses taking the transferable skills initiative

Nobody knows what employers want from their staff more than employers themselves — and many carry out their own training to bring employees up to the standard they want.

Here, four business that have supported The Skills Show outline their view of employability skills and what they're doing to ensure they're present in the workforce.

Jez Langhorn, senior vice president, chief people officer at McDonald's UK

We're proud to offer an industry-leading portfolio of training and qualifications for our employees, from nationally-recognised maths and English qualifications to Ofsted-inspected apprenticeships and foundation degrees.

These opportunities give our people the chance to develop their skills, gain experience and grow in confidence. This not only helps them to perform better in the workplace, but also gives them a broad foundation of transferable skills on which to build their careers, whether that's at McDonald's or elsewhere.

Work-based learning delivers for our business as well as our employees.

By investing in training and development, we are attracting and retaining the most dedicated people and encouraging them to stay with us for longer. One-third of our people who join us aged 16 or 17 remain with us for five years to pursue a career, and 95 per cent of business managers started off with us as crew.

Since January 2009, McDonald's has been providing its employees with the opportunity to gain a City & Guilds intermediate apprenticeship in hospitality and catering (level 2)

More than 16,000 employees have gained an apprenticeship at McDonald's and a further 4,800 workers are currently studying towards an apprenticeship

More than half of McDonald's apprentices are aged 16 to 18

When apprentices start learning, they can complete maths and English courses online to achieve Level 1 and Level 2 Certificates in Adult Literacy and Numeracy if they do not have qualifications at this level already

Around 20,000 maths and English qualifications have been achieved

More than 16,000 apprentices have qualified at intermediate in hospitality and catering and a further 4,800 employees are currently studying towards one

towards one



LifeSkills, created with Barclays, celebrates its first birthday with former Premier League footballer Fabrice Muamba (left), Skills Minister Matthew Hancock (centre), head of LifeSkills Kirstie Mackey (right), and LifeSkills Youth Ambassadors Zabibu Juma and Dominic Bellamy at London's South Bank Skate Park

Kirstie Mackey, head of LifeSkills created with Barclays

According to recent LifeSkills research with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the most common thing employers feel entry level candidates need to develop are basic skills such as time management and relationship skills. While there is an understanding that trade or industry know-how will need to be taught over time, it is the need to hone these basic skills that is often holding young people back when they start looking for work.

Barclays passionately believes that businesses have a role to play in helping young people be prepared for work before they leave education. That's why we launched LifeSkills, created with Barclays last year. By 2015, its aims to give one million young people the skills they need to move successfully into work.

LifeSkills offers free resources for teachers and young people aged 11 to 19 with new materials also developed to support the post-16 education. Including materials that help students to assess their

personality and develop their self-

image, team working, communication and other interpersonal skills and address those issues we know employers are concerned about.

The programme also allows teachers to match their pupils to work experience opportunities with local employers. Our recent research shows why this is so important: nearly 81 per cent of SMEs would like to hire young people who have completed work experience or an apprenticeship.

LifeSkills also offers a recently launched traineeship programme that gives work based learning for 1,200 young people. It also offers free advice to businesses to offer work experience placements and apprenticeships.

To coincide with its one-year anniversary, LifeSkills commissioned The Work Foundation, a leading independent research body, to assess the impact of the programme on young people. The research found an increased sense of hope, enthusiasm and optimism in the young people who took part.

Businesses, education providers and young people all have a role to play in improving the outlook of young people. By working together, we can transform the opportunities for the next generation.



Head of external communications at National Express Jack Kelly

Some industries are perhaps more associated with customer service training than others. Traditional retail companies would spring to mind. At National Express we believe our drivers are central in delivering the service our customers expect. We have made it a key part of driver training.

We have all stepped on to a bus to greet a driver who is in busy traffic, and has a responsibility for nearly 100 people's safety. In many cases they are selling tickets as well. This driver is simultaneously drawing on driving, safety and commercial training.

There is no better place to understand this training and how it is delivered than the industry-leading National Express UK Bus training centre. The award winning centre is at the

front of its field and is the largest owned by an operator in the UK.

Over 500 new recruits go through the centre each year, receiving their relevant driving license as well as safety, customer service, numeracy and literacy qualifications.

On top of this, more than 1,000 existing bus drivers go to the training centre for refresher courses on community welfare, conflict avoidance and commercial awareness.

National Express UK Bus has also introduced the industry's first Master Driver programme, which recognises those who excel at customer service, have impeccable safety records and have completed advanced driving qualifications through the Institute of Advanced Motoring.

This programme shows that industry-



Every one of the 1,500 people a-year through the centre's doors is trained by a fully qualified in-house trainer. To ensure that its staff remain the best qualified

in the bus industry, National Express UK Bus hold a rolling 'train the trainer' programme with external agencies such as the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and the Driving Standards Agency.

Stephanie Morton, Siemens UK entry talent lead

We believe that the development of employability skills is crucial to ensure that our graduates are equipped with the skills as well as the academic expertise to provide a competitive advantage to our businesses. To address this, all our graduates participate in our two-year graduate development programme.

The programme encompasses modular training courses on topics such as customer communication skills and influencing, with choice options in the second year which enable our graduates to attend training courses tailored to their identified development areas, for example presentation skills or project management training.

We also know that developing employability skills doesn't just happen in the classroom, so we ensure that all graduates have access to mentoring — giving the opportunity to develop employability skills 'on the job' with the help and guidance of a more senior employee.



Taking account of the Commons view



CAROLINE DINÉNAGE

Member of the House of Commons Business, Innovation and Skills Select Committee and Conservative MP for Gosport

Two-fifths of our students leave school without a grade C in English and maths GCSE — the minimum qualifications demanded by most employers and universities.

To his credit, Education Secretary Michael Gove has made improving this scandalous state of affairs “the driving moral purpose of our educational reforms”.

Yet speak to employers and they’ll add that we also need to focus on the “softer” skills that too often go overlooked.

Reliability, punctuality, the ability to communicate clearly, work on one’s own initiative or even to maintain eye contact — these ‘skills’ may seem so obvious that they don’t need teaching, but unless they are emphasised in much the same way as basic numeracy and literacy our young people will continue to leave school unprepared for the workplace.

These skills matter. In a survey of businesses last year the Confederation of British Industry found that while 36 per cent of employers said “academic results” was one of the most important factors when recruiting school and college leavers, a staggering 78 per cent said that it was young people’s attitudes to work that mattered most.

So how do we make sure that young people leave school with the right approach to work and the appropriate set of skills?

First, the schools themselves need to play their part. Of course our schools should broaden young peoples’ horizons; inspiring children to explore new books, new sports and new ideas.

Yet we must always remember that our schools are preparing children for the world of work, and a failure to provide children with the necessary skills to flourish in this world is to hold our young people back from achieving their true potential. That means a hard-headed focus in schools on what employers really value, with work experience absolutely key.

We also need to forge stronger links between schools and businesses. It’s great news that 85 per cent businesses now have links with some type of school or college, but that number needs to be even higher. This means engagement from both schools and businesses — and the work of intermediary organisations that bring the two together is essential.

In my area the Portsmouth Education Business Partnership do excellent work giving young people a real understanding of what employers are looking for. Its chief executive, Cath Longhurst, notes that more and more companies say they would prefer to hire someone with a lower level of qualifications, but who is passionate about the role and presents themselves well.

The message from business is clear — employability skills matter, so we need to make sure that young people fully understand the world of work and have the skills they need to get on in life.



ADRIAN BAILEY

Chair of the House of Commons Business, Innovation and Skills Select Committee and Labour MP for West Bromwich West

For young people that step from the long-established routine of school or college life, the demands of paid employment can seem almost insurmountable, requiring skills for which they have hitherto not been prepared.

Having been told that exam qualifications were vital and having achieved them, they suddenly find that to get a job requires a whole lot more.

An applicant for a job must start by understanding the employer’s view. Schools and colleges do provide a huge number of young people with good, but similar qualifications.

They are looking for that something extra that will demonstrate that this person is going to add something to their business. It is up to the young person to demonstrate this.

It is not easy because there is not sufficient joint working between employers and education to teach these so called ‘soft skills’ which enhance a person’s basic education.

The government needs to do more to place this obligation on the education service to work with business to develop these.

“One local employer told me that he recruited on the basis of ‘personal chemistry’. How can you teach personal chemistry?”

Work experience should be made compulsory, schools and colleges should be judged on their involvement with business and record in placing students in work or further training. All this should be backed by a better careers advice service.

There is good practise. I have recently taken part in mock interviews at a local school with considerable business support, but it is still haphazard and needs to be made standard.

One local employer told me that he recruited on the basis of ‘personal chemistry’. How can you teach personal chemistry?

In fact, there are basics which every student should know. A firm handshake, making eye contact and a smile are an essential start for every interview and immediately convey a message to an employer that you are receptive to the demands that may be made on you.

After that it is a must to convince an employer that you understand the need for punctuality, smartness and willingness to listen and work with others.

Trying to understand the employer’s needs and your willingness to acquire the skills to meet them is part of that ‘personal chemistry’ that makes an employer feel that you have that special something to stand out from the crowd.



GORDON BIRTWISTLE

Government apprenticeship ambassador to business, chair of the Liberal Democrat parliamentary committee on business, innovation and skills and MP for Burnley and Padiham

In order for the UK to adequately move forward and grow, we must create a more sustainable, internationally competitive workforce. At the centre of this is ensuring that individuals have the appropriate skills, talents and aspirations for the future.

Employers are reliant on a workforce that allows them to compete nationally and internationally and we need to mobilise the talents of the younger generation to make Britain a success story.

Consequently, the challenge is to build our skills levels like never before. Only a year and a half into the recovery, everyone is talking about the lack of skills or chronic shortage of engineers we face. I believe we must tackle the problem from the outset, and to do so, action needs to be taken in schools and colleges.

As the government’s apprenticeship ambassador to business, I have been active in my role and it is encouraging to see how apprenticeships have developed and expanded since 2010.

Since taking on this role, I have visited many schools, training providers, businesses including small and medium-sized enterprises and apprentices to hear from a range of people and to establish how the government can improve on apprenticeships and overcome some of the challenges that lie ahead.

Apprenticeships are just one way of ensuring that individuals possess transferrable skills and I strongly believe that earning while learning is the way forward.

The government has outlined the need for our system of apprentices to rival that of other countries such as Germany for they demonstrate what a huge contribution to economic productivity a full developed apprenticeship system can make.

We need to go beyond this and continue to work to challenge society’s narrow definitions of talent and preconceptions about suitable routes to employment.

One of the key problems is the stigma associated with apprenticeships and certain careers. It is therefore imperative we as a government improve careers advice in schools so that young people are aware of all of their options. One of the major challenges is for all schools to present all options in an unbiased manner.

Institutions in the FE sector need to deliver the appropriate advice and skills set. Recommendations for action must be include placing employability at the centre of FE and college programmes. Furthermore, the strategic planning, widening access to work placements, and promoting real and equal partnerships between employers and higher education institutions must be done, but done after individuals are equipped with useful skills. If we do not invest in establishing links we can’t possibly expect to see change.

It is the most important challenge we face; for unlocking talent is necessary to lead future growth in the UK that directly affects both you and I.

EXPERTS



DAVID GRAILEY

CHIEF EXECUTIVE, NCFE

Subjectivity fears are no barrier to certification

Employability skills such as team-working and problem-solving could seem to be more about personality and confidence rather than a learned ability. However, David Grailey is confident they can be taught and also measured and accredited.

It’s a common complaint from employers that although there are hundreds of job applicants for any one potential role, many of these prospective employees are lacking in the vital soft skills they need to succeed in the world of work.

In fact, according to research conducted by Reed NCFE, a total of 96 per cent of thousands of employers picked mindset over skillset as the key element they look for in those they seek and retain.

In an economy full of challenges, employers are really starting to focus on complimentary skills and mindset as they can demonstrate a return on investment for them, sometimes with something as simple

as reduced staff turnover.

That’s not to devalue the significance of technical, sector specific skills which are of course essential in order to perform well at work.

However, these skills can be more easily taught on the job than personal attributes (communication skills, critical thinking, team working, presenting yourself well, time management, problem solving etc), which tend to be fine-tuned over a period of time and developed with experience.

But what about the young people who need those skills now? Is it really only through life and work experience that they can gain these elusive transferable skills? Or can they be taught, measured and certificated?

Well, I would argue that yes, you can teach and accredit soft skills and this can be of real benefit to the learner. Through accredited qualifications, learners can be supported to not only develop these skills but also to showcase them in order to improve their job prospects.

An employer’s first impression of an applicant is through their CV. Therefore, if a learner can demonstrate on their CV that they have successfully completed a qualification in a workplace skill then I believe this will differentiate the candidate in a highly competitive marketplace. For a start, it shows real motivation and get-up-and-go that the job seeker has pro-actively completed some formalised learning in order to improve their presence in the workplace.

“Yes, you can teach and accredit soft skills and this can be of real benefit to the learner”

That being said, I do understand the scepticism which surrounds courses such as these. After all, measuring a soft skill can never be done in a quantitative way; it is open to subjectivity and can only truly be measured through behaviour. What’s more, an employer always wants more than a piece of paper — they want a demonstration of skills; they want tangible evidence that the applicant can walk the walk as well as they can talk the talk.

It’s for this reason that qualifications in

soft skills should always be supported by work experience, so that the learner has a chance to contextualise their skills and gain confidence in using them. NCFE offers a number of qualifications in this area which accredit the skills developed prior to, during and post placement in a work experience environment.

Reed NCFE has also taken an innovative approach to their Job Search and Employability qualifications which have been shaped by James Reed’s research into employer behaviours, carried out in association with Harvard Business School.

It is also worth noting that qualifications in soft skills are never intended to be a replacement for sector specific or academic training. In general, they are short courses with low guided learning hours; bite-sized chunks of learning which are incredibly worthwhile additions to any core programme of learning. If skillset is what you do, then mindset is how you do it. It’s easy to see how mindset skills complement the sector specific skills taught to learners.

There’s no doubt about it, the importance of transferable skills cannot be underestimated. It’s no longer enough to be a functional expert (particularly in today’s fluid job market with people changing career direction multiple times in their working life).

If mindset is the key to workplace success, then I truly believe there are qualifications out there to help learners unlock it.



CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF SKILLS SHOW ORGANISERS FIND A FUTURE

ROSS MALONEY

The workplace benefits from having a go and learner versus learner events

The Skills Show has already become a popular annual event with the just the third so far set to take place in November. It is organised by Find A Future, which is also behind WorldSkills UK competitions. Ross Maloney outlines how these are helping to equip those who take part with the skills employers want.

For many employers, a level of uncertainty still exists about the quality of young people entering the workforce from the FE sector.

Without close, consistent engagement with employers, many businesses will continue to overlook the deep pool of talent which our sector can provide that can help to revive the economy longer term, helping to drive economic growth and reverse the youth unemployment trends.

Since 2012, our organisation has introduced more than 150,000 young

people to a broad range of vocational skills and careers opportunities through its flagship national Skills Show event, at the NEC Birmingham in November. This outreach will be extended to a further 200,000 through our European Social Fund-funded programme of more than 200 events, The Skills Show Experience, during 2014.

The key to ensuring the success of these events is the involvement of committed, enthusiastic employers which provide information about real jobs and opportunities which exist – and “bridge the gap” between learning and earning.

Their involvement helps to inspire and motivate the young people they meet, ensuring that their energy and enthusiasm is diverted to the sectors which need them most.

A major challenge facing any provider is to ensure that its learners complete their education armed with the skills appropriate

for the vacancies they will encounter in the workplace.

Find a Future’s work with Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) across the country provides crucial, detailed feedback on the vacancies available, and those areas where a change of focus will be required to deliver local workforce which meets the needs of local employers.

Providers can play their part in this, too. By establishing strong relationships with local employers, which many already do, they can not only anticipate the areas where demands for skilled staff will occur, but also establish a direct link to potential employment for their learners.

Recent research conducted by The Skills Show in partnership with the Association of Colleges highlighted that young people want access to Have-a-Go experiences to provide an insight into the skills required for a wide range of careers.

Providers are ideally placed to facilitate these opportunities through open days and events with schools, providing a direct link between learning and employment.

The research also established that young people, and their parents, are keen to receive up-to-date, detailed careers guidance, which includes information about the skills actually required for particular jobs.

Working closely with local employers and LEPs, providers can ensure that they place themselves at the heart of careers hubs, providing the link between employers and the young people they need to staff their

workforce.

WorldSkills UK skills competitions equip young people with vital functional and soft skills which will improve their prospects within the workplace. Competitors are required to achieve minimum standards in English and maths, both of which are vital for any employer.

At the same time, skills competitions build and champion personal confidence, communications and interpersonal skills among participants — all important, tangible skills that young people can transfer into their working lives.

The benefits of involvement with the skills competition cycle for students, providers and employers are immense. As Chris Thorpe, director at Cimitree (a bespoke furniture manufacturer and employer of George Callow, gold medallist in cabinetmaking at WorldSkills Leipzig 2013) explains, his apprentices have improved in ways that have directly benefitted the business.

He said: “The competition is really focused on efficiency and speed, working methodically at pace and thinking clearly. Which is brilliant for us, because we need these skills in the workplace. I’d recommend any employer get involved, as our apprentices learn a lot from WorldSkills, and develop greatly in terms of character, technical ability and discipline. They also really appreciate our support and value working here – it keeps them happy, which is great for us.”

EXPERTS



FINTAN DONOHUE

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE GAZELLE COLLEGES GROUP

Time to start listening to business

There are many ways to deliver employability skills, and giving learners a strong sense of the business environment is key, says Fintan Donohue.

Ask five different employers what they are looking for in entry-level staff and you may well get five different answers. There is no consensus among businesses on what employability should look like, reflective of the radically shifting jobs market.

Yet none would doubt its growing importance, or the welcome scrutiny that is developing around colleges' ability to deliver on employability.

All employers, big and small, need committed and highly skilled staff, and the FE sector is at the very heart of providing the working world with capable and confident individuals.

It is becoming more and more apparent, highlighted by reports from the Confederation of British Industry and British Chambers of Commerce, that employers of all size are demanding young people who can demonstrate breadth and depth of capability and skill. These are the skills and attributes that traditional qualifications cannot deliver alone.

The challenge to colleges is to nurture young people with the confidence, persistence, creativity and advanced skills that businesses in our 21st Century economy are looking for

Young people also want more and in many cases are seeking a stake in the business that employs them. This sense of ownership results in higher, and growing, levels of motivation, and ultimately creates a more high-performing workforce.

The challenge to colleges, therefore, is to nurture young people with the confidence, persistence, creativity and advanced skills that businesses in our 21st Century economy are looking for.

That will require a pedagogy that is at variance with teaching traditions and

pushes boundaries. The constrained and predictable environments of the past, relying on the transmission of facts and knowledge, will no longer do the job when it comes to developing employability.

As a recent report Gazelle co-authored with Microsoft suggested, teaching must change to reflect the new ways in which young people access information — through mobile, social media and gamification.

To that end, we need to experiment with new curriculum models. One innovation that some Gazelle Colleges are pioneering is in Learning Companies.

The Learning Company, commended by the Richard Review and by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, enables colleges to provide students with some ownership of a business as well as with employability.

Whether these Learning Companies can scale to provide thousands of students with new commercial learning is still uncertain. This is in addition to experimenting with initiatives such as 'Big Student Takeovers' where students take control of a fully functioning business and learn about the working world from the inside out.

So far learners have participated in the publication of a weekly local newspaper, have run a Novotel for the day and have created 'Pop-Up' shop opportunities in a range of locations.

All of these innovations strengthen employability outside of the more traditional workplace.

Learning is significantly accelerated through the experience of commercial environments, and students benefit hugely from a real understanding of the day-to-day realities of business.

In the Gazelle Group, we are trying to create these opportunities, not as a curriculum bolt-on, but an essential component.

Beyond equipping learners with the skills to prosper in a working environment, colleges must also give students the chance to experience what it takes to start a business. The boom in self-employment, and the creation of hundreds of thousands of new businesses since the recession, is not a trend that will go away.

It is the responsibility of colleges to ensure that learners are as ready to create their own employment, as they are to take a job at an existing company. For the first time in history, the number of self employed in the UK is set to exceed the number of employed people.

Many of our colleges will rightly point to an enviable track record of student employment, but our system for assessing how well students match employers' requirements will need to be improved.



FIONA ALDRIDGE

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, DEVELOPMENT AND RESEARCH AT THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ADULT CONTINUING EDUCATION (NIACE)

Acting to avoid any misperception about young people's desire for work

Young people can be left just as confused about what employers want from them, as bosses can be about what motivates young people, explains Fiona Aldridge.

The latest labour market figures, published this month, show the largest quarterly increase in employment since records began in 1992, with falling levels of unemployment among both young people and adults.

While this fall in numbers is welcome, the challenge of youth unemployment is far from over. 565,000 young people — 7.9 per cent of the youth population (a 17 per cent increase from before the recession) — are still unemployed and not in full-time education.

As the economy recovers, education and skills providers have a vital role to play in ensuring that young people understand and invest in the skills, qualities and experience that employers will look for as they seek to fill their vacancies.

This might sound simple, but for many young adults, what employers want is a bit of a mystery.

We frequently hear that employers think young people are not well prepared for the world of work, leaving many of them feeling demoralised and confused about what employers are actually looking for. This can fuel a perception that young people are not motivated or interested in learning or earning.

In reality, most want to work — to follow their dreams, build careers, be financially independent and provide for themselves and their families. All too often however, after submitting numerous job applications, they still find themselves without work and with no real understanding of how they move forward.

However, Niace has been training and supporting three groups of young adults in England, Scotland and Wales to interview local employers about what they look for when recruiting a young person. This innovative project is part of our work as UK National Coordinator for the European Agenda for Adult Learning and has been co-funded by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES).

For many of the young researchers involved, this was the first experience of talking to an employer and their experience

was an enlightening and empowering one.

The key message was that while employers don't expect young people to know everything or be fully skilled, they do expect them to show they have developed some important skills and that they are keen to learn.

For many young adults, what employers want is a bit of a mystery

Most importantly, every employer involved in the study stressed the importance of having a positive attitude, as one of them said: "I like to see a young person with spark and personality; somebody who is determined and tries to do their best every day."

Employers also placed a high importance on 'soft skills', the basic and transferable personal skills that enable people of any age to get on at work — as well as in wider life. Skills like good communication, problem-solving, time management, team work and the ability to work well under pressure are vital.

Alongside these, employers also want specific skills for particular jobs, most notably being able to read and write well, having skills and confidence in maths and being able to use technology.

These skills are not only important for young people in undertaking job roles, but are crucial skills needed in looking for work and applying for jobs.

Finally, almost all of the employers interviewed emphasised the importance of experience — whether work experience or hobbies or volunteering, that give people the kind of valuable skills that can be transferred into the workplace.

The findings of this project are not new, but what is unique, is the process. Young people were trained, supported and empowered to talk to employers and the impact has been transformational.

We are working with these young adults to turn what they have learned into resources for others so we can help many more young people become exactly 'what employers want'.

Showing off skills begins at the job interview — and providers 'get this'

A successful job interview is one in which the applicant has given an impression of confidence in their own abilities, a sense of passion and, importantly, an appreciation of what employers want, according to Teresa Frith, senior skills policy manager at the Association of Colleges.

"The more successful employees generally display what we might term strong employability skills," she said.

"They come across well at interview, which they got through writing a good application, they are confident in their ability to perform, they ask intelligent questions and they are keen and passionate.

"In other words, they fully understand what the employer is looking for and demonstrate that they have it. Ultimately they understand what they are supposed to do and can do it.

"Most colleges get this shift and use their entry point vocational courses to instil such generic, transferable work/life expertise. Key skills have been a part of further education for years, right alongside how to use hairdresser's scissors or change motor oil.

"Neatly hidden, not only from the learners, who are only interested in the vocation at the start, but also it would appear from the policy makers and employers who seem to find it impossible to see beyond the vocational course title."

She added: "Employers, providers and stakeholders may never all agree as to precisely what should be included in the long list of potential 'employability skills', but they really should try."

It's something that the traineeship programme is addressing said Stewart Segal, chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers.

"Employer surveys regularly show that the absence of employability skills is a major concern for businesses seeking to fill their recruitment needs," he said.

"It is making the link between skills and employability which is the only way forward. Training providers can provide that link and they have to join up the many and varied programmes from different government departments. The new traineeships programme is a good example of how the overall challenge is being addressed with the combination of credible work experience, vocational and basic skills required.

"In our view, the combination should cover communication, numeracy, IT awareness, team working and not



Teresa Frith



Stewart Segal

development of a positive attitude."

But apprenticeships are key, too.

"Current apprenticeship frameworks cover these skills and also include creative thinking; independent enquiry; reflective learning; and self-management," said Mr Segal.

"This broad approach to skills development will be important to maintain in the new apprenticeship standards as well as be an important part of traineeships and other programmes developing employability.

"The key to effective employability programmes are early and intensive initial assessment — which should gauge basic skills like literacy and numeracy, flexible programmes that encourage tailored support and targeted skills development based on the job opportunities in the local market.

"The provision of skills through short effective courses should include the delivery of qualification units to enable individuals to build a career not just a job."

But defining transferable, employability skills is not something addressed by solely the UK, as Andy Gannon, 157 Group director of policy, PR and research, pints out.

He said: "There are many attempts to set out what these skills are — the American KIPP schools model has seven, as does the recent Manifesto for Character and Resilience published by the All Party Group on Social Mobility.

"What strikes you in these models is that they talk about attributes and not

behaviours — employability is no longer about doing as you're told or even turning up on time.

Increasingly, it is about how you are — able to be flexible, adaptable to technological change, resilient in the face of setbacks, co-operative with fellow workers and external stakeholders.

"We can break these down into behaviours, but there is no getting away from the notion that employability is about character above all else.

"Maybe that is why careers education is so difficult. Few noticed that the word 'education' was dropped from its association with careers in the 2011 Education Act. It is easy to educate for knowledge. It is relatively easy to educate for practical skill. It is really quite tricky to educate for character.

"Yet all agree that education must play its part — but how? Through after-school clubs, or through assessed curriculum and accreditation? Will any qualification

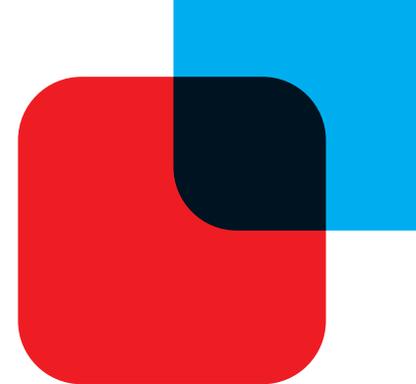


Andy Gannon

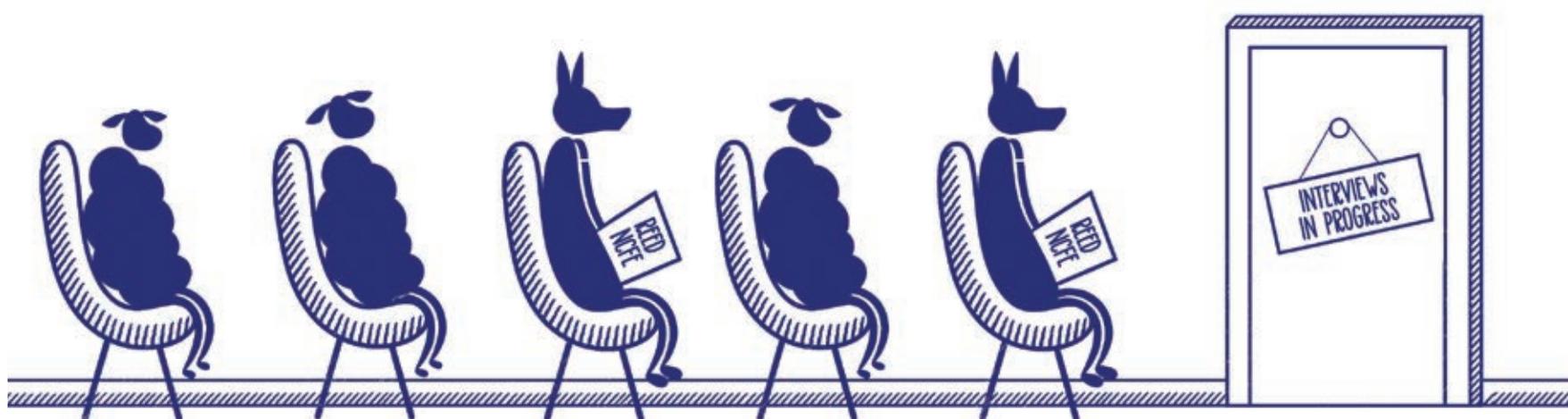
ever be up to the job of assessing character?"

"Adding on' or 'embedding' employability skills is not a helpful notion. Rather, it is the knowledge and skill that should be 'added on' to a fundamental focus on developing an individual's character.

"That surely calls for a fuller debate, rather than tweaks to policy — one in which we consider the role of government, of educators and of employers, but also of parents and of individual learners themselves."



Give your learners an unfair advantage



The REED NCFE Partnership offers flexible solutions for colleges looking to support their students from learning into work and to enhance their employability reputation. Our work with colleges has led to thousands of learners successfully moving into part-time and full time work, and Apprenticeships. *Isn't it time you gave your learners an unfair advantage?*

Call 0191 605 3300 for more information or visit www.reed-ncfe.org.uk

3X more likely to get a job.