WHAT EMPLOYERS WANT
Think mindset not just skillset

As far as the facts go, the rich and powerful can set apart the elite from the masses and those who are not in the same category. However, this is not just about opportunity, but also about the way we handle ourselves and the people around us.

One way to understand this is through the use of mindfulness. Mindfulness is a practice that involves paying attention to the present moment without judgment.

The key to mindset is to develop a growth mindset, which involves the belief that abilities and intelligence can be developed through dedication and hard work. This mindset is crucial in helping people to overcome challenges and achieve their goals.

The benefits of a growth mindset include increased resilience, better decision-making, and improved performance in both academic and professional settings.

In conclusion, mindset is not just about what skills we possess, but also about the way we approach challenges and the way we interact with others. By focusing on mindset, we can improve our ability to adapt to new situations and achieve our goals.
New UKCES report highlights early experience of job environment

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 hitting onto a page, the meaning behind them escaping us slightly.

These words, cloaked 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 trail behind other countries 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 the oral communication, effective time management, 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 youth employer collaboration. The third chapter considers how the UK performs in providing work experience, and said: “The experience of the workplace is fundamental to young people’s career decisions.”

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 part-time work with full-time study).

The third chapter considers how the UK performs in providing work experience, and how young people learn this language through work experience. The fifth chapter considers how young people face such significant barriers to employment.

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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 delivery 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 keep current and future local skills needs. For example, the college works very closely with employers working in the visitor economy, in aerobatics and in construction to identify who employers need and prepare learners successfully for jobs in these areas.

Further examples include Build Up, a dedicated training facility that provides courses which enable learners to develop effective employability skills within the construction industry. Learners develop an appropriate work ethic, prepare learners for jobs in these areas.

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Creative Media students have produced a music video for a local supporter 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 teaching to learn in an industrial context and plan a range of activities which develop learners’ employability and work-related industrial context and planning.

Students must take part in work experience and self-evaluation.

Mature students take part in workplace and self-evaluation activities.

For example, learners in catering and hospitality have had success years running in the national Stephen Twigg D’Urb Touch coaching program.

The college’s Twigg 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 a ‘Army Look at Life’ residential training where they took part in training exercises and experienced typical life at an army barracks.

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

There’s 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 we work closely with local employers to create a sustainable business.

Our experiences in the specific career areas to make it relevant for each student.

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 programmes.

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

We tell 18 to 30 apprenticeships per month and see 125 adults per month for career advice. Attendance across all pre-employability course is 80 per cent, way above the national average of 52 per cent on similar courses.

Success rates are currently between 85 and 90 per cent, again well above the national average of 52 per cent on similar courses. We believe we can achieve 100 per cent success rates in the future.

Developed with employers and Jobcentre Plus, this model has been extremely successful and has placed 800 people into sustainable jobs in the local community. They don’t just want to be called — want their local college to be successful.

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Dr Alison Birkinshaw, principal of York College

I hear the most principals, I talk with employers on a daily basis. As head of the Further Education Foundation, I am 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 aware that industry is very difficult to respond to employer needs. My sense is that this is going to get worse rather than better when the new apprenticeship Trailblazers become the norm.

The reality is that finding restrictions and other ‘red tape’ makes it really difficult to respond to employer needs quickly.

We prefer to be called — want their local college to be financially healthy, and to ensure that strategic decisions are made which benefit students and the local community. They don’t want a ‘budge’ to show their college is excellent, and they don’t want to compete between colleges.

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 finding restrictions and other ‘red tape’ makes it really difficult to respond to employer needs quickly. My sense is that this is going to get worse rather than better when the new apprenticeship Trailblazers become the norm.

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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?

For more information please call 0191 605 3300 or visit www.reed-ncfe.org.uk
Businesses taking the transferable skills initiative

Kirstie Mackey, head of LifeSkills created with Barclays

According to recent LifeSkills research with small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), the most common things employers look for at 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 knowledge will have 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, it aims to give one million young people the skills they need to move more easily into work. LifeSkills offers free resources for teachers and young people aged 11 to 18 to use and also developed support to the post-16 education, including materials that help students to assess their personality and develop their skills.

Stephanie Morton, Siemens UK entry talent lead

We believe that the development of employability skills is crucial to our graduates. That’s why we have an established link with LifeSkills – giving the opportunity to develop the skills and help students into work.

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 to delivering the service our customers expect. We have made it a key part of driver training.

We have all stood on 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 300 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 also has 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 Motorists. This programme shows that industry-
Taking account of the Common View

Subjectivity fears are no barrier to certification

Employability skills such as teamwork, resilience, problem solving would seem to be more about personality and confidence rather than a learned ability. However, David Graley is confident that they can be taught and also measured and assessed.

It is a common complaint from employers that although there are hundreds of job applicants for any one potential role, many of these graduates are employees who lack 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 86% of thousands of employers picked up skills that are key to employee success. While only 39% of employers said they could meet these needs.

What about the young people who need these skills most? It really only holds true by life experience and work experience that they can gain these elusive transferable skills? or can they be taught, measured and accredited.

For the government to improve the skills of their workforce, they need to improve the education of their young people. One of the key problems is the stigma associated with qualifications. Without close, consistent engagement with these employers, many businesses will only continue to look for the half-trained, unskilled employee who is not learning how to develop the soft skills and attributes that will make them more employable.

The benefits of involvement with the WorldSkills competitions and WorldSkills UK awards is clear. Providers are now showing strong relationships with local employers, which many already do, which can only truly be measured through behaviour. What’s more, these relationships never shows more than a piece of paper – it shows a demonstration of a commitment to an individual.

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There are many ways to deliver employability skills, and a strong sense of the business environment is key when it comes to developing employability.

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 at an all-time high and it is crucial that businesses in our 21st Century economy are looking for those with this set of skills.

A five-year longitudinal study of 15,000 young people found that 54% of them went on to employment, 24% to further education, and 22% went on to unemployment. The study highlighted the need for young people to have a range of skills to succeed in the job market.

For many young adults, what employers want is a bit of a mystery. One thing we do know is that employers expect young people to be self-motivated and to be interested in learning or attending training.

One of the most important things that employers look for when recruiting a young person is a positive attitude. Key skills have been a part of education for centuries, but they really should try to:

- cover communication, numeracy, team working and the kind of valuable skills that can be flexible, adaptable to technological change, resilient in the face of uncertainty, and able to think critically and creatively.

One of the key findings of the research was that there is no ‘silver bullet’ solution to developing employability skills. Rather, it is the knowledge and skill that employers are looking for. This knowledge and skill should be developed with the student in mind, rather than focusing on the pass/fail matrix of traditional education.

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 transformative.

”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.”

Employer surveys regularly show that the skills employers are looking for are those that will help them 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 under pressure are vital.

Alongside these, employers also expect applicants to be able to read and write well, to have a range of skills that they need for their entry point vocational courses to an enviable track record of student employability.

But defining transferable, employability skills is not something addressed by the UK’s current apprenticeship standards as employers who seem to find it impossible to see beyond the vocational course title.

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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.