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UK COMMISSION FOR
EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS

The Employability Challenge

Full Report

February 2009

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UK COMMISSION FOR
EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS

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Foreword

There are few more satisfying ways to spend eight hours than working with colleagues and customers to solve problems and make things happen. Work should be, and often is, much more than a way to earn a living. By working together well, individuals contribute to the productivity of the economy and success of society, improve the lives of colleagues and customers, and realise their own creative potential.

This is enabled by everyone coming out of the public employment and skills system being able to work in a team, communicate clearly, listen well, be interested and keen to learn, take criticism, solve problems, read, write and add. These employability skills are the lubricant of our increasingly complex and interconnected workplace. They are not a substitute for specific knowledge and technical skills: but they make the difference between being good at a subject and being good at doing a job.

In 2009, too few people have these skills. Business has been asking for them for twenty years. There are many initiatives underway that aim to meet this need. There is, nevertheless, a long way to go. The UK Commission wants to see two things. We want every school, college, university and training provider to treat the employability of their learners as part of their core business. We want a unified and coherent policy, assessment and funding framework that empowers teaching and training professionals to develop employability.

These things are not going to happen overnight. They call for fundamental changes in attitude: to give employability parity of esteem with academic skills, to build the ability of learning providers to work with business, to come up with assessment methods that drive funding in support of the work that needs to be done.

This document is the UK Commission's opening statement in this debate. We have started at the grass roots, by looking at what just over 200 organisations are currently doing to develop employability skills. This document boils this practice down to core principles which we hope to see developed and adopted more widely.

The theme of employability skills, however, is one to which we will return again and again. We are in this for the long haul. We are going to examine, and catalyse change in every part of the system: learners, learning professionals, institutions, employers, assessment, funding and policy. We are determined to see change for the better.

Sir Mike Rake
Chairman

Executive Summary

Introduction

Without employability skills:

- it will be more challenging for the UK economy to achieve its productivity goals

- individuals will find it harder to get and progress in rewarding work

- several important strands in UK employment and skills policy may be unachievable

The UK Commission believes that a central part of what all publicly-funded training should do is to develop the ability to use knowledge and skills in the workplace effectively. Many learning providers already do help learners develop employability skills. Many, however either neglect to teach employability skills or, for funding or capacity reasons, find it difficult to develop them. The purpose of this document is to set out an unequivocal challenge to practitioners and policy-makers, to raise the status of employability skills, improve practice in developing them, and create a policy environment in which good practice flourishes.

This document is an opening, not a closing statement. It has two perspectives. It concentrates on good practice in the individual learning environment, because that has to be the focus of action. It draws on several studies of what individual employment and skills providers do, and it includes a review of the relevant academic literature. It is not, however, aimed only at teaching and training professionals. It is for all those who are, or need to be, active in making employability skills a reality. Good practice will not flourish without a surrounding framework of policy, funding and assessment that empowers and encourages practitioners to make full use of it.

The Practitioner Challenge

The first perspective, though, is the "grass roots" practitioner perspective. We want to offer practical approaches to the question how do people develop employability skills? We summarise existing evidence and review the practices of several organisations in the field, including universities, colleges, schools and employment training providers. Our main aim is to provide a starting point, or some new ideas, for schools, colleges, universities and employment providers who want to improve the employability of their learners.

We also, however, want to pose a challenge. In preparing this document we heard complaints along the lines of "our institution is different – we can't do that – it's not our role – somebody should make this happen – it's not as simple as that". Many cited the apparent unwillingness of employers to co-operate as a stumbling block. We also met learning providers of all kinds who recognised that in a competitive and globalising labour market, their duty to students has to go beyond teaching specific knowledge and vocational skills. Despite resource constraints, they put time and money into building relationships with employers, structuring teaching around activities, and creating an institutional culture of employability. They make employability part of their core business.

The UK Commission is firmly on the side of this second type of learning provider. It is against complacency and a preference for staying in the comfort zone. If this message is welcome to everyone, then somebody has misunderstood it. We do not think that what is happening at the moment is good enough. We want to see change. Although that change has to be empowered and encouraged (and not impeded) by policy, funding and assessment, it has to *happen* at the level of individual schools, colleges, universities and employment training providers.

For the purposes of this document we take employability skills to be those set out in the diagram below:

Self-management	Thinking and solving problems	Working together and communicating	Understanding the business

Using numbers effectively	Using language effectively	Using IT effectively

Positive Approach
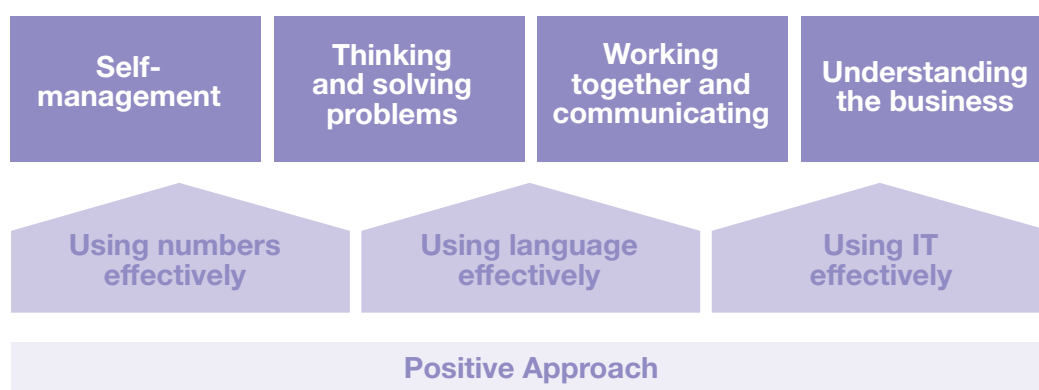
We expand on this definition in Chapter 1, which also sets out why employability skills are so important to the UK. In keeping with our focus on what needs to happen in the learning environment, however, we do not wish to be over-prescriptive about definitions. There are many good ones: they all overlap. Regardless of how employability skills are defined, **the challenges in helping people develop these skills are the same**.

The evidence from the existing literature (see Chapter 1) supports the broad conclusions from our survey of just over 200 organisations. It is a conclusion that, we expect, will not come as a surprise to many experienced teachers and trainers. In broad outline, developing employability skills entails:

- **experiential action-learning**: using skills rather than simply acquiring knowledge, placing emphasis on trial and error, and with a clear focus on the pay-offs for the learner in employment and progression

- **work experience**: a work placement in an actual business, or an authentic classroom simulation based on a real workplace

- opportunities for **reflection and integration**

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 explore in more detail how to make this happen. Chapter 2 is about the most important aspect of employability skills: employer involvement. Getting employers involved transforms training. It is, however, often done badly, or not at all. This chapter discusses:

- the **pay-off for the provider** in involving employers, including:
    - understanding of the training need
    - motivation for learners – a workplace makes the training relevant and the goals believable

- – an optimised learning environment that creates pressures, ambiguity, and consequences for good or bad work

- – improved chances of progression into work

- – a better chance of attracting funding in the current and developing funding world

- identifying and approaching employers using:

- – background research to determine which employers have jobs in areas where the provider has expertise and to which students can and will aspire

- – dialogue to uncover areas for potential co-operation

- – investment in long-term relationships based on empowering the employer and a genuine wish to listen and inform

- developing a business case that articulates how the employer will benefit from participation, examples of which might include:

- – a reliable source of candidates with the skills they need

- – increased workforce diversity, and access to untapped talent pools

- – improved retention by targeting local residents for recruitment

- – increased motivation for staff who enjoy passing on their skills

- – development opportunities for managers or potential managers

- – improved perception by community and customers

- the limitations of Corporate Social Responsibility: it may not last, and philanthropic motives may dilute the very "realness" that the provider needs to get from the business

- the need to treat employer involvement as an important and challenging specialism, requiring investment in capacity-building and resources

Chapter 3 is about what institutions as a whole need to do to transform practice and outcomes. Making employability skills a reality means many institutions and professionals moving out of their comfort zones. This calls for a whole-institution approach, ambitious vision, courageous leadership, and investment in staff and capability.

Chapter 4 is about specific practices in programme design and delivery that appear to work in developing employability skills. These are drawn from good practice already in use. Indeed, much of this good practice is common to a wide range of vocational training. The summary is:

- involve employers by:

- – consulting them at the design stage

- – where possible, drawing on their staff and facilities to deliver the programme, particularly for assessment and feedback

- – building a strong connection between learning and the workplace

- make the learning "real" by:

- – structuring learning around activities

- establishing, agreeing and enforcing expectations

- allowing the possibility of failure and creating consequences for good or bad performance

- making a job the end goal of the programme

- involving non-teaching staff in delivery

- building work placements into the teaching structure

- a high level of personal commitment from the trainer

● build in opportunities for reflection and 360° feedback, to allow learners to "own" what they have learnt (one of the most valuable transferable skills is the ability to transfer one's skills)

● ensure the programme fits the specific learners through:

- baseline assessment

- involving students in shaping the programme

- allowing flexibility and variety in the programme structure

- providing holistic individual support to learners

Chapters 2 to 4 do not set out to be the final word on how to develop employability skills. They do, however, offer practical principles that learning providers can adopt in order to improve their students' employability. Often, however, the challenge is not to *understand* how to develop employability skills. The development of employability skills is not complex. It is, however, difficult to put into practice; it calls for effort and commitment. Hence our challenge to learning providers. We want schools, colleges, universities and employment training providers to:

● adopt and improve existing good practice in the field

● shift resources into building relationships with employers to support employability skills

● build an institutional culture that promotes employability

● make the learning environment resemble the workplace

● invest in the capacity of their staff to develop employability skills

The Policy Challenge

Good practice only happens, however, in the right environment. Hence our second perspective is to set out some of the changes in policy, assessment and funding that will be necessary for this emerging good practice to fulfil its promise. We will return to these topics in subsequent documents, and keep returning to them until the right environment exists. We will also look in much greater detail in future at what employers need to do. These topics are not the central focus of this document, but they are central to the success of employability skills.

Our main challenges for policy makers and funding bodies is to create an environment in which learning providers put employability skills at the heart of what they do. We want to see the emerging good practice which we have begun to capture here taken up across the employment and skills system. We recognise that much good work is already underway in the field. Many individual learning providers are already working hard to develop employability skills. For this to become the norm, and for it to be done well, not half-heartedly, the environment in which all learning providers operate has to change. In particular we want to see action in three areas:

● training: more effort at the national level in defining, selecting and developing the distinctive personal qualities and skills that make an effective teacher of employability skills

● assessment: the existing structure may not be the best way to measure effective development of employability skills. Outcomes-based funding for training is only as good as the definition of the outcomes. We need, therefore, to challenge existing assessment methodologies and, if necessary, develop new approaches that reward good practice in the development of employability skills and give employability skills parity of esteem with specific vocational skills and academic knowledge

● funding structures: flexibility is essential to success in developing employability skills, both to vary the programme to meet the needs of individuals, and to invest in long term employer relationships that may have no immediate pay-off. Funding needs to give institutions scope to work in this way. Funding structures already allow providers to invest in bricks and mortar. They also need to encourage investment in the intangible infrastructure of community, business and social networks

Many good initiatives are underway to improve practice and policy in developing employability skills. We applaud those who have given their backing to these solutions. The problems, however, have been around for too long for anyone to be complacent or content. The UK Commission for Employment and Skills wants to see, and intends to secure, a step change in the development of employability skills in the publicly funded employment and skills system.

1   Introduction: The Employability Challenge

Employability skills are the skills almost everyone needs to do almost any job. They are the skills that make specific knowledge and technical skills fully productive. Without employability skills, UK Plc ceases to be a global economic force and individuals don't get and progress in rewarding jobs. Employability skills, however, are in short supply. A critical question facing the UK employment and skills system/s is, therefore: **how do people acquire employability skills?**

Good practice is emerging but learning providers face barriers to using it. This document is meant to be of use to teachers, trainers, mentors and lecturers, by setting out what a range of learning providers currently do to successfully develop employability skills. It is also meant to challenge policy makers to create frameworks in which good practice can flourish. The UK Commission is determined to transform the practice of employability skills development. We want schools, colleges, universities and employment training providers to:

- adopt and improve existing good practice in the field

- shift resources into building relationships with employers to support employability skills

- build an institutional culture that promotes employability

- invest in the capacity of staff to develop employability skills

We want policy makers, funding bodies and awarding organisations to:

- make sure learning providers have the flexibility to do what is necessary to develop employability skills

- challenge the current assessment of employability and ensure that assessment empowers, rather than frustrates, effective development of employability

- drive better initial training and continuing professional development for employability skills practitioners

- give employability skills parity of esteem with vocational and academic subjects

The question is not "what?" or "why?" but "how?"

It is almost two decades since *Towards a Skills Revolution*[1] put a clear emphasis on employability skills. In the same year, the TUC articulated similar concerns in *Skills 2000*[2]. Since that time, well over a hundred reports in the UK have discussed what employability skills are and why they matter. Annex C summarises and compares twenty published definitions. Two things are clear:

- there is no agreement on a definition of employability skills; but

- almost all definitions are in practice quite similar

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1 *Towards a Skills Revolution*, report of the CBI's Vocational Education and Training Task Force, CBI 1989
2 Trades Union Congress (TUC), 1989, *Skills 2000*. London, TUC

There is clear coalescence around personal communication skills, using numbers, words and technology, problem solving, team working and customer care. Some definitions command more acceptance than others. Two of the more widely accepted are:

- the CBI definition[3]

- the definition developed by the Conference Board of Canada[4] and subsequently adopted by the UK's Sector Skills Councils[5]

For this document we adopt a definition, drawing on those most widely used. We take employability skills to be the skills almost everyone needs to do almost any job. They are the skills that must be present to enable an individual to use the more specific knowledge and technical skills that their particular workplaces will require. They are:

- a foundation of **Positive Approach**: being ready to participate, make suggestions, accept new ideas and constructive criticism, and take responsibility for outcomes

This foundation supports three **Functional Skills**:

- **using numbers effectively** – measuring, recording measurements, calculating, estimating quantities, relating numbers to the job

- **using language effectively** – writing clearly and in a way appropriate to the context, ordering facts and concepts logically

- **using IT effectively** – operating a computer, both using basic systems and also learning other applications as necessary, and using telephones and other technology to communicate

These functional skills are exercised in the context of four **Personal Skills**:

- **self-management** – punctuality and time management, fitting dress and behaviour to context, overcoming challenges and asking for help when necessary

- **thinking and solving problems** – creativity, reflecting on and learning from own actions, prioritising, analysing situations, and developing solutions

Names for skills similar to employability skills in the last twenty years

Core Skills

Key Skills

Essential Skills

Functional Skills

Skills for life

Employability Skills

Generic Skills

Enterprise Skills

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3   CBI, *Time well spent: Embedding employability in work experience*, March 2007, p12 – defines employability skills as Positive Attitude, Self-management, Teamworking, Business and customer awareness, Problem solving, Communication and literacy, Application of numeracy, and Application of information technology.

4   The Conference Board of Canada, *Employability Skills 2000+*, May 2000 – defines employability skills as the abilities to Communicate, Manage information, Use Numbers, Think & Solve Problems, Demonstrate Positive Attitudes & Behaviours, Be Responsible, Be Adaptable, Learn Continuously, Work Safely, Work with Others, and Participate in Projects & Tasks

5   Asset Skills, *Employability Matrix Mapping Tool*, available online at http://www.assetskills.org/ CrossSectorSkills/EmployabilityKeyDocuments.asp

- **working together and communicating** – co-operating, being assertive, persuading, being responsible to others, speaking clearly to individuals and groups and listening for a response

- **understanding the business** – understanding how the individual job fits into the organisation as a whole; recognising the needs of stakeholders (customers and service users, for example); judging risks, innovating, and contributing to the whole organisation

This diagram summarises our definition:

Self-management	Thinking and solving problems	Working together and communicating	Understanding the business
Using numbers effectively	Using language effectively		Using IT effectively
Positive Approach			
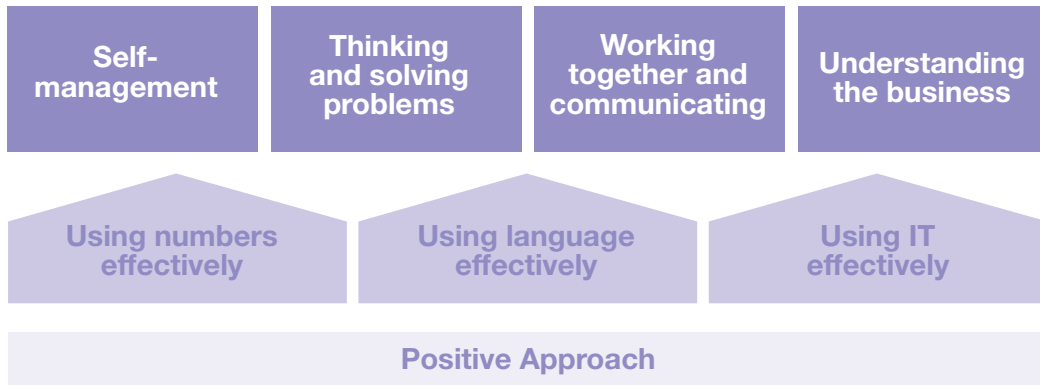
Crucially, regardless of specific definition, **the challenges in helping people develop the skills are the same**. Agreeing on a definition is far less important than agreeing on what needs to change in the learning environment, and in the surrounding framework of policy, assessment and funding. The burning need is not to define employability skills, but to help people acquire them.

The burning platform: employer demand for employability skills

Employability skills are more important now than ever before. The twenty-first century workplace is:

- **interconnected**: almost all twenty-first century jobs involve teamwork. Few workplaces flourish if workers can't communicate. Most employees need to understand and care about the people (customers, service users, tax-payers) whose needs their employer has to meet

- **complex**: few jobs offer satisfaction and progression without demanding an ability to use numbers, computers, telephones and the written word to get things done. The ability to think independently and to solve problems is also essential to enjoyment and success

- **rapidly changing**: there are few jobs-for-life in the twenty-first century workplace. Most people will work for several employers, often in different sectors, over their working life. The pace of change means many specific skills will rapidly become obsolete

Tesco's CEO on the need for employability skills:

"Business has problems in finding people with the skills they need to carry out jobs", adding that "we need people who can read, write and add up. But beyond that, in a business like ours, what we really need are personal skills – the skills of team-working and communicating with others."

Speech by Sir Terry Leahy at the CBI Skills Summit, 12/09/2007 – Tesco Plc

Hence the growing need for employability skills: the lubricant of the workplace, helping people collaborate within and beyond the business; and the transferable skills people use to move from sector to sector. For twenty years, labour market experts and educationalists have discussed and defined these skills, yet today employers still say they are in short supply. The CBI consistently finds[6] business unhappy with the employability skills of candidates recently out of full-time education.

Employers dissatisfaction with the key skills of young recruits

Source: CBI Employment Trends Survey 2008
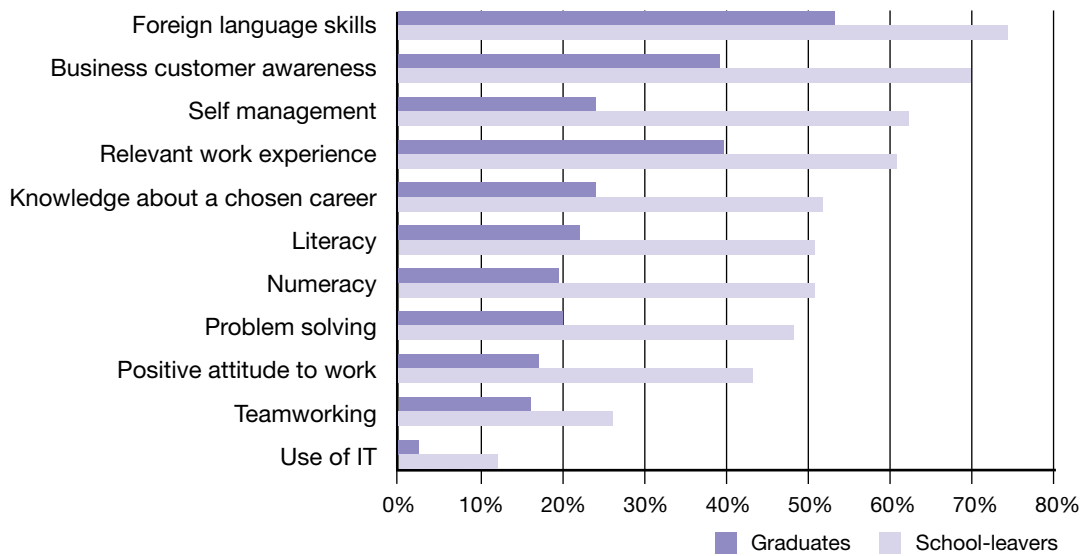
Scottish employers see a lack of oral communication, customer handling and problem solving skills[7].

Skills lacking in skills shortage vacancies – Scotland

Source: CBI Employment Trends Survey 2006

6 CBI, *Employment Trends Survey*, 2008

7 *Skills in Scotland*, Futureskills Scotland, 2006

In England, employers with skills shortage vacancies are short of both "technical and practical skills" and the more generic skills[8]:
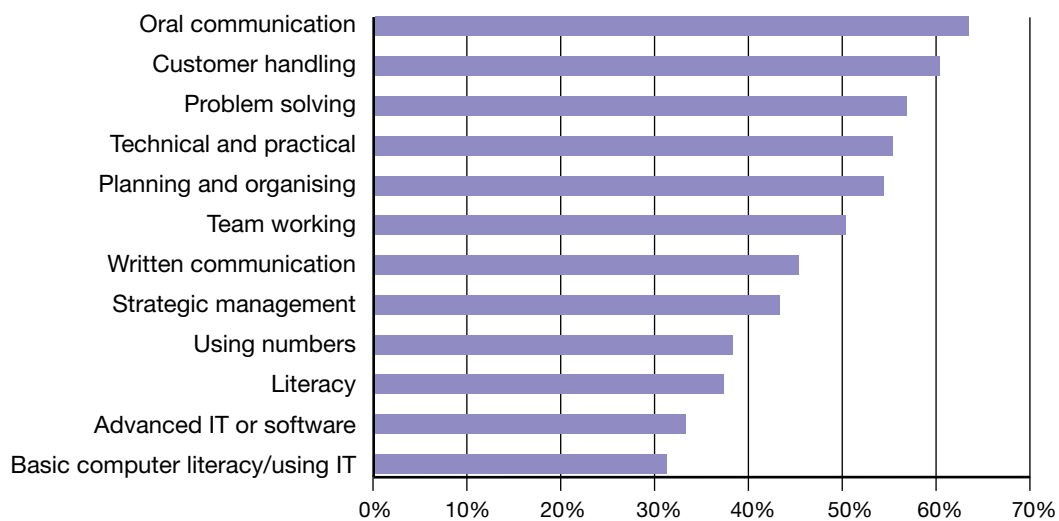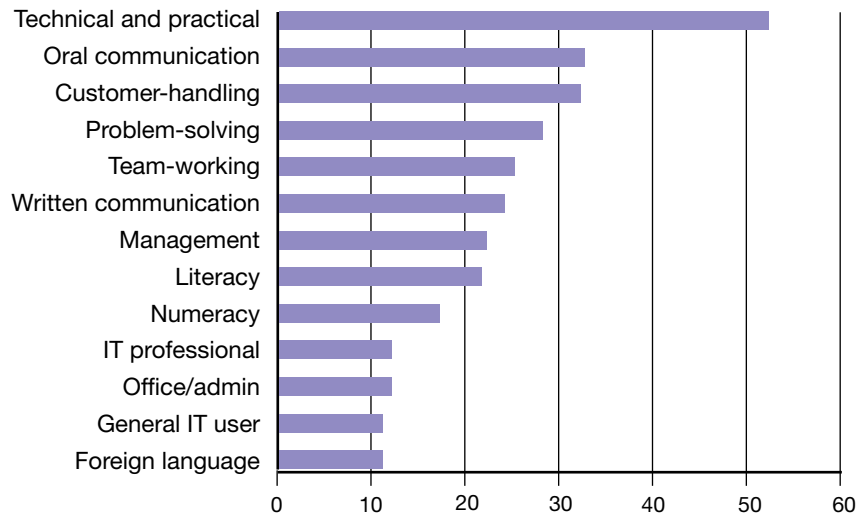
Main skills lacking by occupation where skill-shortage vacancies exist – England

Source: National Employer Skills Survey, Learning and Skills Council 2007

The Welsh Assembly Government's skills strategy[9] says: "Employers increasingly require people to be 'employment-ready' – they rightly expect to employ staff who are literate, numerate, turn up on time, can work in a team and communicate effectively". The Northern Ireland skills strategy[10] aims at "enhancing the quality of those entering the workforce" and emphasises "employability skills, including the key skills of team working, problem solving and flexibility".

A survey by the Learning and Skills Network[11] found that employers don't expect the "finished article", but "they do expect candidates to at least be enthusiastic, literate, numerate and able to turn up on time". "Literacy, communication skills, numeracy and enthusiasm are the most important employability skills in the view of respondents, and a lack of them in a candidate is a 'deal-breaker' for many employers".

There may be a lack of clarity about how people acquire these skills; there is no doubt the UK economy has a burning need for more of them.

Employability skills and wider employment and skills policy

The importance of employability skills is also recognised in a swathe of public policy – sometimes explicitly, sometimes by implication. Priorities vary, but all see skills as part of an integrated process leading to a job; all agree that meeting the employer's needs is critical to success.

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8 *National Employer Skills Survey*, LSC England, 2007

9 *Skills That Work for Wales*, Welsh Assembly Government, 2008

10 *Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland*, Department for Employment and Learning, 2004

11 *Employability skills explored,* Rob Martin, Frank Villeneuve-Smith, Liz Marshall and Ewan McKenzie, LSN 2008

This document is not the place for a comprehensive treatment of policy. It is important to acknowledge, however, that the UK Commission's interest in employability skills is shared by a wide range of organisations and strategies, including the following:

- in England, the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) have published a series of command papers, culminating in *Work Skills*[12], setting out a framework for integrating employment and skills delivery. The Integration of Employment and Skills (IES) programme is trialling measures to help individuals gain sustainable employment, including skills screening measures to identify employability skills gaps

- in England, Scotland and Wales, Local Employment Partnerships aim to forge links between Jobcentre Plus, providers and employers

- Skills Development Scotland pulls together agencies with remits that straddle the old divide between employment and skills. The Scottish Funding Council's *Learning to Work* implementation plan[13] includes baseline research, institutional development, employer involvement, and monitoring of progress

- Wales has established its own Skills and Employment Board to bring an employer challenge and emphasise the imperative of integration

- in England, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) is seeking to promote a range of good practices in work-related learning in schools[14]. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's (QCA) Personal Learning and Thinking Skills framework is growing in acceptance

- the Scottish Government[15] has set targets around increased employment levels. *Skills for Scotland*[16] identifies employability skills as key to meeting labour market needs and creating employment opportunities. It sets this as an important role for both Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE)

- the Welsh Baccalaureate offers some interesting lessons in building work experience and team work into mainstream education. It requires development of all six Key Skills in its compulsory core. Northern Ireland's distinctive approach to Key Skills may also provide an instructive model

- England's National Council for Educational Excellence has made valuable recommendations about involving employers in schools[17]

- Unionlearn supports Union Learning Representatives in working with employers to embed a culture of learning into the workplace and engage workers across the board in improving their competencies

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12 *Work Skills*, DIUS and DWP, 2008

13 *Employability: Implementation Plan for Learning to Work*, Scottish Funding Council, 2006

14 See *The Work-related Learning Guide*, DCSF, 2008

15 *The Government Economic Strategy*, Scottish Government 2007; *National Performance Framework*, Scottish Government, 2007 (http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/scotPerforms)

16 *Skills for Scotland: a Lifelong Learning Skills Strategy*, Scottish Government, 2007

17 *National Council for Educational Excellence: Recommendations*, DCSF, 2008

- the Scottish Government, working with the UK Commission, is particularly concerned to ensure that higher qualification levels translate into higher productivity

- seven Multi-Area-Agreements in England are knitting together skills provision with pathways into work; the London Skills and Employment Board is improving co-operation between LSC and Jobcentre Plus; City Strategy Pathfinders have a similar aim

The UK Commission wants all such strategies to flourish. Their success depends, however, on improvements in the policy and practice around developing employability skills. There are also thousands of capable, motivated learning professionals in strong institutions, doing very good work in developing the employability of those they teach or train. Such professionals are to be honoured. They often work, however, in an environment that doesn't support or empower them, and many other professionals and organisations do not, or cannot, achieve their high standards. This is where the UK Commission is determined to see change.

Existing Evidence and Good Practice

Although developing employability skills is proverbially "not rocket science", it is not easy, and is often left undone. There is a great deal of research in the field[18]. Many existing programmes, too numerous to do justice to here, are putting this research into action. We need to plunder existing research and good practice: there is no time to reinvent the wheel. Some useful sources are boxed below.

Sources of existing good practice in employability skills development

OFSTED Good Practice Database:
http://excellence.qia.org.uk/page.aspx?o=goodpracticedatabase

Learning and Employability papers from the Higher Education Academy, in particular *Pedagogy for Employability*:
http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/publications/learningandemployability

Learning to Work, published by the Scottish Funding Council:
http://www.sfc.ac.uk/publications/pubs_other_sfefcarchive/learning_to_work.pdf

Time well spent: embedding employability in work experience, CBI, March 2007:
http://www.cbi.org.uk/ndbs/positiondoc.nsf/1f08ec61711f29768025672a0055f7a8/
9AB1FEC8237B38EB802572CE0056178A/$file/timewellspent.pdf

Policy Research Institute and ITS literature review commissioned for this study:
http://www.ukces.org.uk/pdf/Employability%20Skills%20Project%200608.pdf

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18 Policy Research Institute, *Review of Evidence on Best Practice in Teaching and Assessing Employability Skills*, June 2008.

The core of developing employability skills is broadly agreed to be:

- **experiential action-learning** using skills rather than simply acquiring knowledge, with an emphasis on trial and error and a focus on the pay-off for the learner in employment and progression

- **work experience**[19], preferably work placements, but otherwise classroom experiences that simulate the complexity, ambiguity, unpredictability and consequences of success or failure present in the workplace

- opportunities for **reflection and integration**: learners, with feedback from staff, peers and employers, look at learning experiences and prepare to put them into action in other situations

These are not controversial conclusions. These practices are already well-known to many learning professionals across a range of disciplines; they are just not practised widely enough. Although much of the existing research was based in England, most studies were generic enough for their conclusions to be relevant across the UK. The Scottish Funding Council, for example, reached similar conclusions in 2004[20].

This simple agenda is, however, challenging to deliver. It requires:

- strong institutional support to bring in new practices and make sure that they work holistically

- varying approaches for different groups with different aspirations

- the personal commitment to set and enforce high expectations

- teacher autonomy, flexibility and personalisation

The primary need, then, is to build on and, above all, to **act on**, existing good practice. Many of the barriers to developing employability skills are not only about pedagogy, but about employer engagement, institutional and professional capability, leadership, and resources. Getting the development of employability skills right is a holistic challenge. We detail this challenge in the body of the report. It is summarised in the "employability wheel".

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19 The Department for Children, Schools and Families offers a useful definition of work experience in *The Work-related Learning Guide*, DCSF 2008, p12

20 *Learning to Work*, Scottish Funding Councils for Further and Higher Education, 2004

Employability Wheel

Learning more relevant to current labour market needs

Better able to respond to learner and employer needs

Higher credibility with employers and funding bodies

Greater opportunity to progress through job seeking network

Employability is understood as a core value

Use skills to actively contribute to the workplace

Employers given the opportunity to contribute to programe design and delivery

Commitment & vision to make employability core business

Develop an institutional culture supportive of employability

Learner attitude reflects institutional positive attitude

Offer an optimised learning environment

Learners motivated by realistic goals and employer feedback

Provider seeks and acts on employer feedback

Whole organisation approach

Quality assured focus on clear success criteria for employability

Learners can demonstrate their skills to an employer

Raises the stakes for learners

Employer Involvement

Leadership & Resources

Invest time and money to develop high quality staff and resources

Learners and employers are supported by professional and competent staff

Develop an appreciation of workplace culture, style and attitudes

Access to jobs

Employability Skills

Plan, monitor and evaluate provision

Teachers & trainers update their industry skills

Create sustainable and flexible approaches to delivery

Continuous improvement in the service to learners and employers

Consolidate learning by applying skills

Programme Design & Delivery

Experiential learning with timely feedback

Build in reality - including responsibility

A meaningful context and purpose to learning

A focus on workplace skills, attitudes and behaviours

Employers involved in design and delivery

Better able to articulate how to contribute to the workplace

Supportive environment with time to reflect

Learner centred holistic support

Mastery of skills - able to transfer into workplace and throughout career

A more enjoyable and challenging learning experience

Clearer understanding of progress and planned learning

Develop an ability to reflect and adjust skills, attitudes and behaviour

Key

Inner circle: critical factors
Middle circle: key features
Outer circle: impact on learner, employer and provider

Scope and Approach

The scope of this document is intentionally focused; it is by no means the UK Commission's last word on the subject. Although it points the way to future work on policy, funding and assessment, it is mainly about the practicalities of developing employability. It is principally concerned with:

● **the publicly funded employment and skills system**: although employers also have a role to play[21], they are not the focus of this document

● **those not currently in the workforce**: although the UK Commission is concerned with the skills of those in work, this document concentrates on people in schools, colleges, universities and employment-preparation programmes

● **skills development, not assessment**. Assessing outcomes is nevertheless vital, not least because assessment drives practice. Many providers find assessment structures make it hard to do what they believe is necessary to develop employability skills. There is a strong belief amongst practitioners that current assessment methods do not measure the subjective and qualitative aspects of employability skills well. Although this area is not a focus of the current report, it will merit further investigation. Business

21 The UK Commission's remit includes "Promoting employer investment in people and the better use of their skills at all levels"

HR departments may be fruitful areas for research. Employers bet their wage bills on getting assessment right, so their methodologies are worth examining

● **skills for doing, rather than getting the job**: it is true that learning interview technique and CV writing may contribute to learning some employability skills; but job-getting skills are not what employers tell us they find lacking in candidates and they are not therefore the focus of this document

● **what needs to happen in the learning environment**: this document is not a comprehensive survey of existing initiatives. Our focus is not on celebrating what is already working, but on championing practices that must be developed and used more widely

To write this document we used site visits, telephone interviews, web research and a review of submissions sent in response to our call for evidence. To find out how these organisations develop employability skills we researched, interviewed, visited or corresponded with just over 200 organisations including schools, FE colleges, universities and employment training providers; and employers. As part of this effort we developed twenty detailed case studies, which are referenced throughout Chapters 2, 3 and 4 to illustrate key points. The case studies are available for download at www.ukces.org.uk/pdf/ EmployabilityChallengeCaseStudies.pdf. Information on the participants in the study, and the list of participants who were the subject of case studies, is in Annex A.

This work was done with input from the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform and in collaboration with the Learning and Skills Network (LSN). LSN helped conduct the research and offered valuable input as part of the project Advisory Panel and throughout the drafting and editing process. We are grateful for the support of these organisations. We also received very valuable input from the members of our Advisory Panel, who are listed in Annex B.

We also commissioned a comprehensive literature survey[22], and drew on the experience of professionals within the UK Commission and related organisations, in particular Asset Skills. The remainder of this document covers:

● **employer involvement**: involving employers in course design and delivery, and in recruiting at the end, is fundamental to success. Chapter 2 offers ways to do this

● **leadership and resources**: some learning providers will need to make challenging strategic choices to get employability skills right: Chapter 3 discusses what this asks of the whole institution

● **programme design and delivery**: Chapter 4 discusses ways to make development of employability skills experiential and reality-based, with opportunities to reflect

● **conclusions and challenges**: in Chapter 5 we summarise lessons from this study, and challenge providers and policy makers to improve the development of employability skills in the UK workforce

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22 Policy Research Institute, *Review of Evidence on Best Practice in Teaching and Assessing Employability Skills*, June 2008.

2 Employer Involvement

The key to developing employability skills is to start with the employer. This does **not** mean asking employers to yet again define employability skills[23]. It means:

- drawing on the expertise and authority of employers to help individuals acquire these skills

- involving employers in the process to make it real to the learners

- empowering employers to insist on the employability skills they need, rather than those the provider is most comfortable delivering

The pay-off from employer involvement

Understanding the training need

A mathematics teacher is the expert in whether the student can do mathematics, but an employability trainer is not the expert in whether the student is employable: the employer is. Operating in a workplace is a matter of style, culture and attitude. Direct contact with the workplace is the best way to get these messages across. This might mean:

- bringing the employer into the classroom

- bringing the trainee into the workplace

- equipping the trainer with up to date methods and approaches

- giving the trainer the chance to experience the workplace

The direct link with an employer keeps training fresh and improves the likelihood that it will steer the learner in the right direction.

Training With Purpose, a case study participant, includes an employer presentation in its job readiness programmes. The brief to the employer offers the "opportunity to inform and influence the young people on the necessary skills, behaviours and attitudes necessary to work with your industry and the real world of work". The presentation covers:

- trends in the industry that young people should be aware of in preparation for becoming employees

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Forms of employer involvement

Work **placements** for course participants

Staff from an employer doing some of the **training**

The employer contributing to the **design** of the course

Employer-provided **materials** to support a course

Employer **facilities** to host parts of a course

Employer involvement in **assessment**

Mentoring for course participants

Workplace **experience** for trainers and teachers

Access to job **vacancies** for graduates

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23 One consistent message from our study was that employers think that providers should by now know in general terms what employability skills are – those set out in this document, and in other reputable definitions.

- challenges the employer faces in recruiting young people

- what young people can do to prepare for interview and work

- common mistakes applicants make when applying

- what makes a successful employee in the sector

- skills, qualities, attributes and experience new recruits need

Sponsors for Educational Opportunity (SEO) gains understanding of the training need through being a truly employer-led provider. The banks who provide internships also sit on the board, help determine training, and host and deliver sessions. Their staff act as interviewers and mentors. This makes for a close match between the skills SEO develops and the needs of the workplace.

Newham College helps teachers gain workplace experience by rewarding those who obtain a Grade One lesson observation with time to gain further experience in the industry. They cascade the skills they acquire to other staff through meetings and collaboration. Newham also creates opportunities for students to apply their skills in a work setting.

Motivating the learner

Many courses we reviewed found that employer involvement raised the motivation of the learners. Direct contact with a real workplace makes the end goal of the training – a rewarding career – a more believable reality. Learners are motivated to perform when employers are involved in assessing their work.

The Young Enterprise Company Programme aims to offer students a business experience that is more than a simulation, and often involves students in dealing with real customers and suppliers beyond the school.

The Prince's Trust runs a series of "Get Into" programmes to open up interesting careers, particularly for those facing barriers to getting work. Their partner for Get Into Cooking gives an inspirational first day address as part of the programme, describing the personal history of the family firm from apprenticeship, through development of the business, to ultimate high-profile success. Trainees visit the company's workplaces, receive lessons in the kitchen from top ranking chefs, and have the chance to prepare and serve a tea and a lunch. This experience could not be replicated without investment in a strong relationship with the employer. It has a very powerful motivating effect on trainees.

Newham College runs a commercial hair salon outside the college which receives no subsidy and must be competitive to remain open. The salon manager supports students in developing business awareness, balancing active learning with the need to deliver a quality service. The manager started in the salon as a receptionist and worked her way up to her current role. This experience of progression confers credibility and makes for a positive working relationship with students.

At many universities (of which Leicester, reviewed for this document, is typical) employers assess student presentations. Course leaders report that students find this motivating, and act on feedback from employers relating to both presentation and content.

Providing the best learning environment

The importance of appearance and personal presentation can be brought home to a student in a workplace in a way that may be harder to do in a classroom. A manager whose job involves revenue generation, hiring and firing, can deliver a message on the best way to serve the customer that will be accurate and clearly heard.

A student who lacks the confidence to enter the workplace can gain confidence from direct contact with an employer mentor. For example, as a result of working with her mentor, a participant in the Career Academies UK programme said, "I used to think that people in Canary Wharf were really different and that I was invisible to them. I now realise they're just like me."

It is worth noting that simulated workplaces also have a proven effectiveness. Most studies say it is important for the learning environment to be *like* a workplace. Some[24] suggest that a good simulation is as effective as actual exposure to a real business environment. It may also make it easier to teach use of numbers, technology and the written word because it can offer a more representative set of learning experiences. The key is to recreate genuine aspects of the workplace. This is not just about space and equipment, but should include consequences for poor performance, uncertainty and ambiguity. In establishing a simulated workplace, however, teachers and trainers will benefit from working with employers[25], and simulated workplaces should not be seen as a substitute for investment in relationships with employers.

At the institutional level, employer involvement helps a provider set and meet high standards for quality and outputs. Sponsors for Educational Opportunity has a highly polished programme with strong presentation and administration, in part because the "customers" are investment banks who will not accept anything else. In this and other cases, there is a valuable transfer of management skills from the employer to the learning institution.

Improving progression

A big pay-off from employer involvement is that it gives learners better access to vacancies. Work placements put students in front of employers so that the employers can make an informed judgement to recruit the students.

Harper Adams University College indicate that typically between twenty and forty per cent of students who undertake high quality work placements subsequently obtain permanent employment with the firm which provides the placement.

Sponsors for Educational Opportunity (SEO) gives those on its programmes the chance to network with executives from sponsor banks. The executives can meet all the SEO interns and often invite small groups of students to follow-up awareness and networking meetings. This is, in essence, a job-matching exercise, and is often very beneficial for all involved.

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24 *E.g.* Stazs, C., Ramsey, K., Eden, R., DaVamzo, J., Farris, H. and Lewis, M., *Classrooms that Work: Teaching Generic Skills in Academic and Vocational Settings*, Berkley, California: Rand and National Centers for Research in Vocational Education.

25 BT, for example, is considering establishing a centre to help teachers understand the relationship between IT and business.

Opportunities to meet and interact with employers in informal settings were particularly valuable for students who were not used to job interviews. A learner who lacks confidence or experience may well be better at *doing* the job than at *getting* the job. Involving employers provides learners with a better setting to prove they have the skills employers want. In the Prince's Trust Get Into Digital Media programme, trainees work alongside the partner employer throughout the programme, and have a low-pressure opportunity to demonstrate their ability.

Attracting funding

Five years ago it was possible to succeed as a learning provider in isolation from the world of employers. Today the chances of obtaining funding for courses and programmes that don't engage with what employers want and can offer, are more and more limited. This is the way policy is going. To succeed, providers will need to evidence their relationships with local employers, and their understanding of local labour demand.

How to get employer involvement

The process of involving employers, as exemplified in the organisations reviewed for this study, typically involves the following steps:

- **background research** – identifying and understanding the target employer, and picking the right route of approach
- **listening** – meeting with the employer, and taking the time to understand the employer's needs and constraints
- **developing a proposition** – finding ways that the employer can benefit from engaging with the learning provider
- **presenting the business case** – making this proposition specific to the employer in question, and putting it across in a way that gains acceptance
- ongoing engagement and development of the relationship to improve mutual benefits

Background research

Employability skills are largely generic. Employers do, however, need employability skills in conjunction with job-specific technical skills. Moreover, employability skills look different in different places. This variation is not just from sector to sector, occupation to occupation, but from business to business. Some aspects of employability skills are cultural, and culture is specific to a place or organisation. For all these reasons, employers will tend to engage with learning providers who:

- recognise and understand the specifics of their business
- have some expertise in their field

Some successful examples of employer involvement are quite narrowly focused. Newham College, through its Centre for Innovation and Partnerships, has developed a Women's Business Centre providing business support, training, counselling, contacts and start-up offices. The college works with a local jeweller to develop a course teaching both jewellery

skills and the generic skills necessary to start and run a business. This collaboration with a specific local employer has resulted in benefits for the business: not only a ready supply of capable candidates and suitable vacancies, but sharing of resources for exhibitions and promotions. The SEO and Get Into programmes cited above also have a strong record of cultivating close relationships with particular employers, developing an understanding of their business, and offering them sector-specific ways to get involved.

Involving employers therefore has to start with research to determine:

- what are the occupations where:
  - the provider has expertise or an affinity with the subject matter
  - the typical learner could reasonably aspire to get employment
  - the typical learner is likely to find the work exciting and attractive?
- within these occupational categories, which employers are:
  - located close enough to the provider
  - likely to be willing to get involved?

This information comes from:

- published sources such as skills organisation surveys (*e.g.* Skills In Scotland, National Employer Skills Survey) and job search sites
- local organisations, for example chambers of commerce
- personal networks including those of trustees, governors, supportive political figures and so on

Providers will be able to draw heavily on, and work with, careers services and SSCs, who have remits of in the development and dissemination of labour market information. It is not necessary to re-invent the wheel: it simple necessary to have some good wheels.

Listening

The ultimate aim is to identify the right person to approach within the target employer, ideally a senior person – in a small business the Managing Director, in a larger business perhaps the HR Director. It needs to be someone with the freedom to do something unusual, and imagination to see working with a learning provider as an opportunity.

The initial conversations should be open-ended. It is important not to pre-judge what an employer wants, or go with a specific thing to ask for or sell. A common theme in the successful employer involvement we observed was *dialogue*. Involving employers worked well based on:

- long term engagement and relationship-building, rather than a "fire and forget" approach
- a genuine wish to listen to and inform the employer – seeing dialogue not as a *quid pro quo* but as an end itself
- empowering the employer to shape and lead the process
- commitment to working through differences of opinion, misunderstandings and conflicting objectives

Sponsors for Educational Opportunity (SEO), who provide work experience and training in financial services primarily for people from ethnic minorities under-represented in the sector, find that recruiters and diversity professionals are key points of contact. At every firm, one serves as the dedicated relationship manager for SEO, helps SEO understand recruitment priorities, and provides access to the wider firm.

The aim of the initial conversation should be to outline areas of shared interest and mutual benefit.

Developing a proposition

Once areas of shared interest and mutual benefit are discovered, they are worked into a proposition. A proposition is a deal articulating what the employer and provider will do. The proposition should fit the employer and providers business needs.

The ultimate aim is to secure from the employer:

- an in-principle acceptance of the proposition at the senior level

- a named contact at an operational level who is given responsibility for making the proposition work in detail

Corporate social responsibility is admirable but not enough on its own

Many employers will engage with learning providers, schools and colleges because they simply want to "give something back". These generous motives are welcome, but there are two drawbacks to employer involvement that is driven only by corporate social responsibility:

- it may not last very long

- it may not be the best kind of employer involvement to support the development of employability skills

This second point is worth dwelling on. Learners' exposure to the real world of the workplace is intended to subject them to the unsentimental discipline of an employer who needs to get a job done. When employers get involved out of philanthropic motives they may leave their business mindset behind, thus reducing the value of their involvement.

Even where the employer wants to give something, there will be a desire to give something specific and value-added that creates discernible benefits; and the employer will want to be asked for something it is particularly suited to offer. Newham College was an interesting example of an entrepreneurial approach: striking mutually beneficial deals with local businesses to provide good candidates in return for good job and business opportunities, that offer spin-off benefits. Some examples are in the case studies that support this document[26]. The aim should be to build partnerships that last because they are good for all concerned, so that working with the learning provider becomes "business as usual" for the employer.

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26 For the twenty case studies supporting this document, please visit
www.ukces.org.uk/pdf/EmployabilityChallengeCaseStudies.pdf. See Annex A for further information.

Of the learning providers reviewed for this survey, those who had the most success with involving employers tended to be those who had worked with particular employers, or in a particular sector, for a long period.

Providing benefits for the employer's business is all-important

The key to involving employers, therefore, is a proposition that fits the business' long-term objectives. The best thing a well-run employability skills programme can offer an employer is good quality applicants, particularly for skills shortage vacancies. Businesses live or die by the quality of their staff and, and there is, as discussed, a shortage of staff with employability skills. So the core of employer involvement is a deal. The employer gives specific kinds of support to the course: the employer gets a steady stream of job-ready candidates. The employer may also derive other benefits from working with learning providers.

Potential benefits for employers involved in employability skills programmes

A reliable source of **candidates** with the skills they need

Increase workforce **diversity**, and provide access to untapped talent pools, by recruiting from groups that face barriers to entry (SEO, for example, puts forward credible candidates drawn from groups traditionally under-represented in banking)

Improve **retention** by targeting recruitment at local residents

Increase **motivation** for staff who relish the opportunity to pass on their skills

Offer **development** opportunities for managers or potential managers ("an opportunity to grow our own employees' coaching and leadership skills, in a low cost, no risk environment", as an employer in one placement programme put it)

Improve **perception** by community and customers

Derive value from the **work** that the students undertake whilst on the placement

Lastly, the activities the employer gets involved in may themselves be of direct benefit to the employer. Providing a work placement need not be a net cost for the employer. Career Academies UK, for example, are experienced in preparing students for placements, and in matching students to businesses. They frequently receive positive (sometimes surprised) feedback from employers. "The interns have proved more than a spare pair of hands," as one HR manager remarked. Harper Adams University College students undertake assignments to develop and present solutions to problems put to them by employers, which have included:

- determining public perception of town centre safety after dark, for a Safer Communities Partnership
- recommending ways to broaden customer base for a local farm shop
- developing an approach to supplying ethnic food producers with local produce

All these activities, as well as helping develop employability skills, provided real value for the businesses and other organisations engaged.

Presenting the business case

Simplifying access

Engagement with learning providers is seldom something employers actively seek: it needs to be made easy. University of Wales, Newport, for example, concentrates its contact with employers through its Research and Enterprise Department, and uses customer relationship management software to track contacts with business. This adds to and enhances existing contacts with individual programmes and departments, and provides employers with a direct point of contact within the institution. The employer-led National Council for Educational Excellence in England identifies having a single point of contact for employers as being of general importance[27]. Learning providers in the same community may wish to work together to reduce the likelihood of a small number of employers being over-targeted.

Investing in a long relationship

The most productive employer relationships are often the longest established ones. An enduring relationship allows providers to build up trust and understanding, on the basis of which the employer may make a considerable contribution to the course in time, resources and management insight. Close working relationships can offer unexpected opportunities for collaboration.

To make this happen, employers must be kept involved and informed. The provider should learn from the employer, and educate them about the participant group. They should also make sure the employer has access to the right kind of support as it participates in the programme. Career Academies UK holds an employer briefing session before interns arrive for the summer. SEO meets employers who offer internships to assess progress and identify necessary support. Prince's Trust staff work to familiarise partner employers with the participant population whom they might not normally target for recruitment.

The need for capacity building

Employer involvement is both crucial and also more difficult to manage than it may at first appear. Learning providers need to take up this challenge. They also need to make sure they are equipped to do it well. If a learning provider endeavours to involve employers in its work and does not succeed, it should not assume this is a result of ill-will or apathy on the part of the employers. The lesson from those providers who have put time, effort and skill into building up relationships with employers is that with perseverance it is almost always possible to put across a compelling case: the pay-off from so doing is immense.

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27 National Council for Educational Excellence: Recommendations, Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008, Business Recommendation 2 (p6)

Providers should identify replicable good practice. They need to persevere (and the funding system needs to allow them to persevere) in building relationships and networks. They need to seek out specialist advice and support, and build capacity. They should also collaborate with other providers. If several schools, colleges, universities and employment providers all court the same small pool of businesses in a local area, they can poison the well. Emerging employment and skills boards in England, and similar community level employer partnerships in other nations, may provide a useful focus for co-ordinating employer involvement, and we encourage providers to support and shape them.

Employer involvement action list

(1) Make employer involvement the top priority in establishing an employability skills programme – be prepared to invest time and money in developing a long-term relationship even if pay-offs are not immediate.

(2) Recognise that building employer relationships is a specialist skill, ensure there are staff in the organisation who have that skill, and seek specialist advice and support in building employer networks.

(3) Start with background research to identify:

- occupations where the provider has expertise, and where the typical learner could reasonably aspire to work and would want to work

- which employers are located close enough to the provider and likely to be willing to get involved

(4) Use networks and personal contacts as well as direct approaches to find the right person (ideally quite senior) at the employer for an initial conversation. Try not to compete with other providers for the ear of the same employer.

(5) Listen and engage in dialogue. This should be an open-ended conversation without preconceptions. Concentrate on understanding the employer's business needs and looking for areas where collaborating in developing employability skills could add value to them.

(6) Adopt a flexible approach – be prepared to offer different options, recognising that businesses vary in the amount of time, resources and commitment they can offer.

(7) Develop a proposition based on real value to the business, not on corporate social responsibility. The key value proposition is: the employer has access to a ready supply of job-ready candidates. Other things the employer may find beneficial include:

- increased workforce **diversity**, and access to untapped talent pools

- improved **retention** by targeting local residents for recruitment

- increased **motivation** for staff who enjoy passing on their skills

- **development** opportunities for managers or potential managers

- improved **perception** by community and customers

- the value of the **work** learners undertake whilst on placement

(8) Ask the employer for something specific and value-added that creates discernible benefits for the learner, and which the employer is particularly suited to offer.

(9) Identify an operational member of staff within the employer who will be the main point of contact – ideally the senior level contact should make collaboration with the provider part of this operational staff member's job description.

(10) Build a long-term relationship based on continuing dialogue and:

- a genuine wish to **listen to and inform** the employer

- **empowerment** of the employer to shape and lead the process

- **commitment** to working through differences of opinion, misunderstandings and conflicting objectives

3 Leadership and Resources

A positive attitude may be one aspect of employability that an individual needs to develop. A change in *institutional* attitude is likely to be a pre-requisite for institutional success.

Learning providers will often need to make systemic changes to the way in which they do things in employability development. Developing employability skills well may add up to a way of doing things outside some people's comfort zone, and may require investment in professional and institutional development. Good practice in employability skills thus relies on good leadership: to create the necessary culture, and to commit the necessary resources.

Institutional vision

Creating a vision

Many of the successful organisations we reviewed had a clear idea of who they were. They could state simply what they did, and how they did it. They did not claim that their way was the best: but it was what worked for them, and the whole organisation bought into it.

Skill Force has a distinctive ethos drawn from the shared culture of the (largely) ex-Forces staff on whom it relies.

LEAP articulates its culture as based on the values of:

- integrity
- empathy
- professionalism
- passion
- dedication
- creativity
- excellence

Stanley High School emphasises:

- teamwork
- individual responsibility
- personal achievement

The head teacher takes the view that developing shared values is vital "because it gives pupils a sense of belonging as well as providing a starting point for changing policies and culture within the school."

Skills Training UK sets out what it wants from its staff as:

- service excellence
- problem solving

- passionate
- building effective relationships
- business focus

Newham College describes its culture as one in which students and teachers "live and breathe employability". There is an emphasis on professional behaviour and appearance from the doors of the college onwards. Staff treat students as colleagues, which entails different, and sometimes more demanding, expectations. Staff are expected to focus on the customer – by which they mean learners and employers.

Research evidence bears out the value of coherent institutional culture as a foundation of good teaching. Evaluations of Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning suggest that a "whole school" approach is a key to success. Changing school culture is also thought to be important[28].

A number of the organisations surveyed took a broad view of their remit, which was important to their work in employability. Several colleges with interesting practices also saw themselves as having a community leadership role – providing resources and convening meetings for example. They had a sense of themselves as having an obligation to serve a particular geographical area. Many were active in building networks of local businesses.

The success of the Renfrewshire Sports Leader Awards Programme depends on a network of alliances that goes well beyond the learning environment. It was approved by a group chaired by the Leader of the Council, and therefore has strong local political support. Councillors are invited to see the sports leaders in action and appreciate the benefits that they bring to their local community, and the programme is supported by the Paisley Partnership Regeneration Company.

Leadership challenges in building employability skills capacity

Developing capacity in **employer involvement**

Building **flexibility** into training programmes

Embedding employability training (where this is appropriate) in training for specific technical skills

Investing in **professional development** of staff

Building **activities** and action-learning into the curriculum, and developing the teaching skills necessary to do this well

Engaging with participants in a more personal way, being willing to provide feedback not just on poor performance, but on inappropriate behaviour

Assessing development of skills in more qualitative and subjective ways than usual

Developing an institutional culture in which employability skills are taught from the moment a participant enrols, rather than isolated in the classroom

Providing the necessary **resources** and professional development

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28 Smith, P., O'Donnell, L., Easton, C. and Rudd, P. (2007), *Secondary Social, Emotional and Behavioural Skills (SEBS) Pilot Evaluation*, DfES Research Report DCSF-RR003, London: Department for Education and Skills; Hallam, S., Rhamie, J., and Shaw, J. (2006). *Evaluation of the Primary Behaviour and Attendance Pilot*, DfES Research Report 717, London: Department for Education and Skills.

Several learning providers also took a broad view of what constituted education, encompassing activities that might be described as social care, personal transformation and community development.

Making the vision a reality

Making the vision a reality starts with articulating it and writing it down. This means not just a single vision statement, but embedding elements of the vision into all documents that bear on how the organisation works. Birmingham City University, which describes employability as a "hot topic", builds aspects of an employability approach into:

- mission and vision statements
- learning and teaching strategy
- the "Philosophy" element of their module framework
- strategic documents
- practical guidance

It may also be possible to build employability into incentives and performance management, and into programme assessment measures. This, of course, depends to a large extent on what funding bodies ask for. One key driver of institutional behaviour in universities is the Research Assessment Exercise, which does not place employability at the centre of the institution's vision. This is a challenge for funders: to provide funding streams that encourage an institutional culture supportive of employability skills.

Within existing funding structures, however, some learning providers were able to incentivise an employability culture. Training With Purpose builds an interest in employability skills into their recruitment. Newham rewards teachers who gain a Grade One lesson observation with time off to gain further experience in industry, and makes employability skills integral to their work towards the Training Quality Standard.

Bringing in these structures requires personal leadership, which includes:

- risk taking
- willingness (and determination) to defer success in order to get the culture right
- persuasiveness and charisma

Stanley High School in Southport provides a good example of the challenges in establishing a new culture supportive of employability, and the qualities need to overcome them. The case study on Stanley High School[29] discusses this at length. Several organisations reviewed for this survey had leaders with a distinctive personal approach and passion which they communicated to the institution as a whole.

Ysgol Basaleg (Bassaleg School) has taken a whole-institution approach to implementing the revised curriculum introduced recently by the Welsh Assembly Government. This curriculum focuses on the relationships between young people, their learning and the world of work. Ysgol Basaleg has updated its programme to prepare students for further study

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29 For the twenty case studies supporting this document, please visit www.ukces.org.uk/pdf/EmployabilityChallengeCaseStudies.pdf and click on publications. See Annex A for further information.

and employment. Students build on their existing employability skills and awareness of work as they progress in the school. They receive a general introduction to the skills and knowledge needed to make informed choices, and the transition into continuing education, training and employment is monitored and managed.

Staff

Clearly the *sine qua non* of making this vision a reality is staff with the right motivation and ability. Developing employability skills presents unique professional challenges. It is a specialist discipline and requires distinctive personal characteristics. It is also, unusually, a topic best taught in combination with other subjects. The right person to teach the specific technical subject may be the wrong person to develop employability skills[30]. This entails investment in staff development and in innovative structures to allow multi-disciplinary staff to work together.

There is often value in bringing in external expertise. Some interesting programmes we reviewed either hired permanent staff from unusual backgrounds (armed forces, industry *etc*) or invited staff from employers to deliver talks and other parts of the training.

It is also possible to develop existing staff to deliver employability skills. Birmingham City University, for example, operate a dedicated unit to design and deliver workshops for academic staff to enable them to enhance personal development planning and employability provision. Staff from this unit work as "consultants" with course teams, offering resources they can tailor for use in the learning environment. Some providers made opportunities for staff to spend time in business, shadowing or observing. Institutions could also second staff to other providers that are existing centres of excellence.

Developing these abilities takes time and money. The ability to develop employability skills requires investment. This needs, like training in the teaching of any other discipline, to happen over the long term. A "fire and forget" module with no continuing professional development is not enough. There are few resources and centres of excellence dedicated to making this investment. The Deloitte "Train the Trainer" course is a 4-day residential programme, funded by the Deloitte Foundation which equips participants with techniques for delivery of experiential training and allows for personal reflection. It aims to keep practitioners current with approaches to developing employability skills that do not seem widely available within the learning system.

A message from several learning providers (including more than one employer) was that it is important to empower teaching staff. Employability is difficult to constrain within a tightly ordered curriculum. It is essential not only to give staff the skills to develop employability, but also to allow them choice in how they use these skills.

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30 See for example Roberts, C., Baynham, M., Shrubshall, P., Brittan, J., Cooper, B., Gidley, N., Windsor, V., Eldred, J., Grief, S., Castillino, C., and Walsh, M., *Embedded Teaching and Learning of Adult Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL: Seven Case Studies*, London: National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy – which found that when a single teacher was responsible for both vocational training *and* Language, Literacy and Numeracy, course outcomes declined*.*

Finally, it is clear that taking a "whole organisation" approach to employability may throw up the need for non-teaching staff with specialist skills. Employer involvement, to take the most significant example, is a specific and resource-intensive activity. A study of 88 colleges[31] found that the second largest barrier to linking with employers was a lack of human resources.

Willingness to spend time and money

Employer involvement is vital to development of employability skills. The resources to make it happen need to be found. Where resources are limited, this may mean that they have to be diverted from something else – to employer involvement and other aspects of employability skills development. This is not to underestimate the pressures that provider budgets are under; it is to assert that employability skills are worth making sacrifices for.

An ESECT study[32] argued for a well-resourced environment in promoting student engagement. Some providers we reviewed articulated the need for teaching materials that were "cutting edge": they preferred to illustrate case studies and exercises with real company data. Birmingham City University have a project to develop employability resources, such as case studies and scenarios using video IT and virtual learning environment. They develop scenarios with employers to demonstrate workplace situations that require employees to adapt, think on their feet and apply knowledge. Newham and Edinburgh's Telford College are among those allocating significant sums of money to making the college environment a mix of space, furniture, layout and modern equipment that simulates a high quality business workplace. This appears to improve students' learning, and staff report that vandalism is rare.

Many learning providers also made a large intangible investment, in planning, relationship building and community engagement. Career Academies UK asks schools to invest £2,500, and a good deal of staff time, in a "year of planning" before any students participate in the course, to develop a support structure that enable all participants to succeed. Creative Partnerships invest in planning and relationships before the programme commences, to ensure that all involved (teacher, creative agent, creative practitioner) work well together. Employer involvement, discussed in detail above, can be another large up front cost.

Many of these investments do not produced short term quantifiable outputs. Bringing them in, therefore calls for a degree of trust and a broad view of institutional performance management and value for money. This represents another challenge for policy makers and funders: to find accountable ways to let institutions do what they need to do, perhaps by varying the payment cycle or introducing longer term outcome measures.

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31 McCoshan, A. and Souto-Otero, M. (2003), *Further Education Colleges' Views on FE-Employer Links*, DfES Research Report 442, Nottingham: Department for Education and Skills

32 ESECT (2006), *Pedagogy for Employability, Learning & Employability Series One*, York: Higher Education Academy

Leadership and resources action list

(1) Build up a whole-institution employability culture in which students are practising employability from the moment they walk through the door, and in which employability is understood to be everyone's job – employability a part of "core business".

(2) Identify and articulate the institution's vision and values.

(3) Communicate vision and values consistently over the long term, building them into foundational documents (mission statement, strategy, guidance notes *etc*) of the institution, and into target and incentive structures.

(4) Be willing to move the institution, and the professionals within it, out of their comfort zone.

(5) If necessary, reallocate time and money into employability skills.

(6) Be prepared to defer success in order to create a culture and institutional capability of lasting value.

(7) Develop capacity in employer involvement, either by developing existing staff or by recruiting specialists.

(8) Build strong and genuine relationships with employers, students and staff, and be resolute in seeking, hearing and acting on feedback.

(9) Treat employability skills as the complex specialism it is, and invest accordingly in staff, CPD, and infrastructure.

(10) Provide the necessary resources and professional development, if necessary at the expense of doing something else.

(11) Assess development of skills in more qualitative and subjective ways than may be usual.

4   Programme Design and Delivery

Involve employers in design

The key to successful programme design is to build it around the views and experience of employers. The chapter on Employer Involvement deals with this at greater length.

The Prince's Trust, in its Get Into programmes, identifies and works closely with partner employers as follows:

- once an employer has agreed to participate, a delivery contract is agreed
- the programme team and the employer work together to design a Taster/Selection Day and the rest of the programme
- the programme team prepares the employer for working with the young people
- throughout delivery, there is an open dialogue between employer and programme team
- at the end, the employer completes an evaluation

Many employability skills are about collaborating and communicating within a given culture. Hence, they are quite specific to individual employers. Many employers we reviewed develop, for their own training purposes, a core set of values which they articulate simply and consistently, and which inform how they develop employability skills. Smaller businesses which might not have a formal framework in place, are clear about their ethos and the behaviours they require. Providers will find it useful to understand these values and build them into design.

It is also important *not* to burden employers with *unnecessary* design work. A clear message from our review was that employers think providers should already understand what "employability skills" means. There was a strong preference for a provider starting with one of the more widely accepted definitions as a basis for using employer resources in more sophisticated ways.

Making it real

Another essential element in successful courses and programmes is an attempt to make the experience, as some respondents put it, "real". Deloitte, who now have seven years experience of delivering employability skills programmes, conclude: "Attitudinal change cannot take place by learning from a text book or by writing assignments". This means different things in practice. Two particularly strong themes are:

- connecting the course with an actual workplace and involving non-teaching staff in delivery
- building two-way relationships with learners and, critically, raising the stakes by allowing the possibility of failure and creating consequences for poor performance

Forging a connection with the workplace

Many employers in our survey seldom or never used classroom methods to develop employability skills. Many learning providers found work placements to be an important part of their programmes. The value of work placements is also very well-attested in the literature. Structured work experience has been found[33] to improve the ability of graduates to find employment, and to find employment in graduate-level jobs.

Elements in a successful work placement

Employer involvement – getting the employer to participate more than nominally, to see value in the placement, and trust the provider.

Matching participant to employer – ensuring the participant has the ability and personality to fit with the employer, and that the employer does something the participant finds exciting.

Establishing measurable objectives of value to employer and learner – making them realistic, and documenting them.

Agreeing roles and responsibilities – with some light touch documentation, and named contacts for resolving uncertainty or solving problems.

Supporting the employer and their staff before and during the programme – with background briefings on what works and what doesn't work, possibly some cultural awareness preparation, and regular meetings with learning provider professionals.

Supporting the learner through the programme – mentoring, particularly in the early stages, to help resolve misunderstandings and maintain confidence.

Assessing the programme and building in improvements next time.

For a provider, the main challenges in making a reality of this are the practicalities of setting up effective work placements. A number of case studies[34] discuss setting up and running successful placements. A detailed checklist of the elements of a successful work placement can be found in the DCSF Quality Standard for Work Experience[35].

Other ways programmes have linked the learning experience with the workplace include:

● using employer facilities to deliver courses. Employers host groups from SEO for tours, presentations, trading games, practice interviews, and c.v. development. The Prince's Trust delivers short courses on the premises of partner companies in its "Get Into" courses

33 Mason, G., Williams, G. and Cranmer, S. (2006), *Employability Skills Initiatives in Higher Education: What Effects do They Have on Graduate Labour Market Outcomes?* http://www.niesr.ac.uk/pdf/061006_91257.pdf

34 For the twenty case studies supporting this document, please visit www.ukces.org.uk/pdf/ EmployabilityChallengeCaseStudies.pdf and click on publications. See particularly those on Belfast Metropolitan College, Career Academies UK, Harper Adams University, Dundee University and Sponsors for Educational Opportunity

35 Quality Standard for Work Experience, Department for Children, Schools and Families 2008

- involving employer staff in delivery. LEAP invites employers into courses to talk about vacancies they want to fill and skills they seek, as well as talking about the importance of personal presentation and acceptance of workplace culture. Career Academies UK invites "guru lecturers", senior staff of partner businesses, to deliver classroom teaching based on their commercial experience, covering such subjects as customer service and job search

- involving employer staff in selection and assessment. The Prince's Trust asks staff from partner businesses to sit on panels to select individuals to participate in their "Get Into" courses

Of course, the strongest link between the training environment and the workplace is the opportunity of a job. Many successful programmes made this link explicit in different ways:

- discussing the possibility of a work placement becoming a full time job

- inviting employers to recruit or discuss their vacancies on site

- inviting staff of employers to talk about their jobs

- framing the course as preparation for a particular job

In addition to formal employer links negotiated by the learning provider, many students may already be gaining workplace experience because they are working to support themselves through their course. Colleges and universities can capitalise on this by providing structured opportunities for students to reflect on, integrate and learn from their own workplace experiences. This requires an investment in finding out what students are doing in the way of part time work, and in bringing specialist expertise to bear on it.

Building in consequences

Having said that, forging connections with the workplace is not the only way to make learning "real". Providers who have yet to build a successful employer network will need to draw on a range of other techniques to simulate the employer environment. Several providers used exercises separate from the work place but made them complex and challenging.

A repeated theme was the value of raising the stakes and creating consequences. One of the challenges for policy makers is to come up with funding structures that allow providers to build in

Approaches to building in consequences

Making sure something (ideally a job) was on offer as a reward for success at the end of the programme

Being prepared to take the emotional risk of confronting unacceptable behaviour honestly and frankly

Harnessing peer pressure by holding teams accountable for individual behaviour

Being public and transparent about:

- establishing and agreeing expectations

- signalling when individuals have not met expectations

Being prepared to "fail" participants and possibly even eject them from the programme

consequences. The possibility of having to leave the course may help develop positive attitudes; but funding tied to course completion makes this difficult for the provider.

The successful programmes we reviewed offered numerous examples of building accountability and consequences into employability training.

Many customers of employment programmes had not faced high expectations before and respond positively when instructors insisted on good performance. LEAP sets high expectations and enforces them throughout. This is a key part of the STRIVE programme, aimed at individuals to a large extent alienated from the world of work. A detailed case study of LEAP[36] discusses how this works: four key elements are boxed below.

One programme that operated in a prison setting used a theatre production as a learning exercise. This provided a project that was complex and challenging in itself, and that trainees became passionate about. The consequences of failure were public exposure, which tested team work, planning and communication, and greatly increased trainees' confidence when they met these tests.

Employers have an advantage in creating consequences for good or bad performance, since consequences are already built into the workplace. Some, however, go further to create consequences even in formal training settings. Rolls-Royce organises apprentices into self-managed teams and scores them on punctuality, application and performance. Scores are displayed in their working areas. The result is that team members take responsibility and support each another, which leads to improved performance.

Sports-based programmes are particularly good at creating consequences, since success and failure are measured on a scale that everyone understands.

The Deloitte employability skills initiative includes a "group contract" in which students and trainers sign up to standards of participation and behaviour. This re-enforces positive classroom behaviour and sets agreed penalties for inappropriate behaviour. It is designed to function in the same way as an "employment contract", building some aspects of the real world of work into the student's experience.

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36 This is one of twenty case studies supporting this document that are available for download at www.ukces. org.uk/pdf/EmployabilityChallengeCaseStudies.pdf in the publications section. See Annex A for further information.

Four elements of building in consequences through expectations

Clear setting of ground rules: learners know that penalties will be imposed, for example, for mobile telephones that ring during the sessions, and that repeated lateness will result in dismissal.

Uncompromising follow-through: infractions of agreed standards are dealt with publicly in the agreed manner – to convey a lesson to the whole group.

High level of personal engagement: it requires emotional courage not to avoid conflict by ignoring unacceptable behaviour: but it is often at the moments of conflict that lessons are learnt. Sometimes the most motivating thing for someone written off in the past is to be held to a high standard of behaviour. This cannot be done according to a formula or script – it requires personal involvement by the tutor, at the cost of some emotional risk.

High level of skill: The skill required here is hard to articulate, but includes aspects of:

- communication –picking up signals from learners about their attitudes find rhetorical and inter-personal strategies to tackle them
- personal resilience
- cultural awareness and credibility

These skills can be developed. It is important to recognise, though, that not everyone will be able to be good at this.

Activities

Nearly all programmes featured activities – some were nothing but activities. These ranged from teamwork or presentation exercises to a multi-week project aimed at producing a short film.

One Young Enterprise graduate said, "Young Enterprise is the sole reason that I am here today as a young business man…I was never interested in reading, writing or listening to someone, because I thought I always knew more. As soon as I got the opportunity to experience real responsibility and real challenges, I thrived on it".

A core feature of the Deloitte approach to developing employability skills is that learning is based around practical exercises, simulations, role plays and scenarios that replicate real employment and workplace situations. Students

Examples of activities used by providers in the survey

Business challenges designed by employers

Work in community settings such as fundraising or organising charity events

Outdoor activities

Real small business ventures

Projects drawing on pre-existing personal interests such as model making

Projects such as making a short film, newspaper or t-shirts

Theatre productions

gain understanding of the theory and principles of employability through a journey of personal development and "actively experiencing the practical reality of different workplace situations."

Trainees found the Training with Purpose "Dragons' Den" activity motivating and challenging for a number of reasons:

- "having seen it for real on the television I never thought I'd be able to do anything like that – create a business and then try to get someone to back me financially"

- "the activity was really fun but challenging, it required us to present to a panel of people and made me do something I really don't like – public speaking, but I realised I am actually quite good at"

- "it tested all of the things they had learnt during the week including team working, communication, and an understanding of what employers need and want"

The competitive element of the activity gave trainees little choice but to behave in a professional way. Activities that start with something in which trainees are already interested appeared particularly effective, underlining the value of baseline assessment.

Dundee University runs regular events and competitions for students to give them opportunities to gain experience through exposure to the world of work. They include "Enterprise Gym Awards", "Employer Led Learning", "Technology for the Future" and an "Innovation Showcase". Some are run in conjunction with local employers.

The development of employability skills by employers also typically focused on activities rather than instruction.

- BT gives graduate recruits and apprentices the opportunity to participate in leadership weekends run by the territorial army

- London Underground's development of soft skills is based on 360 degree feedback leading to development plans which are closely tracked by the individual's manager

Some employers who did try to develop soft skills through courses, rather than in the work place, found that staff often questioned the value of such courses.

The learning environment as workplace

Developing employability skills happens not only in the workshop or training room. It happens in the whole institution. The culture of the institution has a powerful effect on the development of employability skills. Conversely, if the institution is *not* fully behind the employability agenda, then no matter how good the teacher, what happens in the class room will never be look or feel "real" to the students.

Newham College positions itself in the local business environment and takes an active role in the local chamber of commerce. Some vocational courses offer services to the paying public, exposing students to customers in the course of their training. Students can also earn their way through their courses by taking administrative and reception jobs in the college. The college puts effort into creating a physical environment that looks like a professional workplace. Students are meant to learn employability from the moment they enter the college.

There is a heavy emphasis on recreating the workplace as part of Deloitte employability courses. Students are encouraged to view their teachers as their workplace "manager". A Group Contract is agreed between the students and their teachers to reflect a contract of employment and includes details on dress code, appropriate conduct and relevant sanctions for non-compliance or underperformance.

Opportunities for reflection

Opportunities to reflect are vital. Learners need to reflect on what they can already do, as a basis for development; and they need to reflect on what they have learnt, to cement and activate their newly acquired skills.

Building in opportunities for reflection

IBM asks staff to update their CVs using an online CV tool and submit them to resource managers. This helps staff reflect on their employability and where they fit best in the organisation.

A large public employer whose practices we reviewed develops teamwork by asking staff to observe another team, or shadow another member of staff, and reflect on what they are doing. Staff also use an online guide to produce a personal development plan, identifying their own skills gaps.

LEAP encourages reflection in a number of different ways – often in spontaneous conversations (for which space and flexibility is allowed in programme design) in which instructors ask something as simple as "How do you feel about what just happened?"

Edinburgh's Telford College asks students to fill out a Reflective Log of extra-curricular experiences at the college, considering the lessons they learn from them and how the experiences help them progress towards their goal. Opportunities to discuss this log one-to-one with a tutor are built into the course.

Many **universities** that responded to our call for evidence set a reflective written assignment as part of the assessment of an employability module. This typically required students to reflect on and demonstrate understanding of their strengths and weaknesses in relation to a specific career aspiration.

Employability skills are exercised in a very wide variety of contexts. The same skill "looks" different in different places. Hence it can be hard for individuals to identify when they have grasped a particular employability skill. It is easy to know when one has mastered the skill of typing at 70 w.p.m., and to transfer that skill from a desktop to a laptop computer. Communication, on the other hand, is something one could be good at in some contexts without realising it was a workplace skill.

Some employability skills may be learnt quite quickly. Aspects of attitude, resilience, customer service and so on, are often a matter of deciding (or remembering) to do something, rather than doing something new. Some people may require an in-depth

training intervention to develop some of these attitudinal skills. On the other hand, for some people, the skill may be one that they have already, but simply have not recognised. In such cases reflection will be an efficient way to develop the skill. Several of the organisations we reviewed built opportunities for reflection into their employability training.

The Quality Assurance Agency encourages all universities to adopt a policy for personal development plans for all students. Dundee University, surveyed for this document uses:

● a web-based "ePDP" account for all undergraduate students, which can be tailored for different vocational and professional disciplines

● support for career planning for non-vocational students, including a credit-bearing module

● a credit-bearing internship programme to undergraduate and post-graduate students, including career planning elements

One university emphasised the importance of reflection thus: "Often in Higher Education employability skills are so embedded in the curriculum and methods of assessment students do not realise they have acquired them." Although it is a feature of most forms of teaching, reflection may be particularly important in employability because, as one respondent said, "the key transferable skill is the ability to transfer your skills".

Real-time feedback

Swift and frequent feedback to learners/trainees is a hallmark of successful courses. It can come from:

● staff

● employers

● peers

Both Training with Purpose and LEAP look for staff who can give constructive and unambiguous feedback. There are formal opportunities for feedback throughout the programme (after exercises, mock interviews or presentations, for example). Staff also reflect learners back to themselves in less formal ways: challenging or encouraging team behaviours, pointing out good problem solving strategies and so on. Harper Adams University College also laid stress on giving feedback on performance in exercises as soon as possible.

In common with many practices touched on this document, real-time feedback is used in much mainstream teaching. It is, however, particularly important in developing employability skills because of the evanescent quality of experiential learning. If a student makes a mistake in solving a quadratic equation, the teacher and student can revisit the error months later. If a student in a cycle maintenance course makes a mistake in ordering enough spokes to build five radial and five semi-tangent wheels, the source of the error, and what needs to be done to avoid it recurring, is much more context-dependent. It needs to be addressed with real-time feedback.

Feedback is easy to prescribe but hard to do. It is often done badly. In some of the programmes reviewed, feedback was formally given, but not in a way that appeared to be effective. Simply to say "it's not acceptable to come into the class late" is insufficient.

There must be two-way engagement between trainer and participant, to the point where the participant acknowledges feedback and either accepts or rejects it.

Employers are often a source of very good quality feedback. Work placements are particularly good environments to receive real-time feedback. Employer representatives in the learning environment also improves feedback. Leicester University for example, in its "Leicester Award" programme, asks employers to give one-to-one feedback to students who have given presentations.

Why is this effective? It may be because workplace culture is more tuned to providing feedback, or less tolerant of unproductive behaviour. It may also be a work environment makes it is easier for students to see the point of the feedback. There is also, however, the disheartening possibility that some trainers preferred to delegate feedback to the work placement rather than to engage in the challenging and sometimes confrontational business of doing it themselves.

Several programmes provide opportunities for group feedback from trainees. Implemented well, this can be very valuable. It can be more credible and immediate than feedback from the trainer. With good support and facilitation, learners can help each other to recognise areas for development, build one another's confidence and help each other overcome difficulties. In one college, students worked in mixed age and ability groups to run a fully functioning office. This offered opportunities for leadership, group work and skill transfer in a style resembling a real workplace. Involving learners of different abilities encouraged peer support and developed responsibility in more able learners.

Peer feedback can also, however, be formulaic and uninformative if implemented badly. The skill of eliciting specific, clear and helpful feedback from trainees is one less widely recognised aspect of developing employability skills. Of course, learning to give good feedback is itself valuable for trainees. Developing techniques for giving and receiving feedback are a core part of the Deloitte employability programme, with students required, as in employment, to provide peer to peer constructive feedback on a regular basis throughout course.

It is also possible to empower students to feed back on their own performance in real-time, for example by videoing student presentations and interviews. Students then assess their own performance alongside formal feedback from staff and peers. The most powerful feedback is often the observation "Oh no... how could I do it like *that?*"

Feedback is also a resource for the learning institution itself. Newham College uses online surveys in its Progression and Employability Skills programme to adapt its programmes progressively to meet the needs ofparticipants.

Focus on the learner

Any well-thought-out teaching or training course will no doubt involve:

- understanding what skills learners already have
- building relationships of honesty and respect
- allowing for flexibility in delivery

These appear to be particularly important in the case of employability skills, however. This is because the skills are more personal and hence more varied. This means that initial assessment is a less clear-cut exercise, and teaching calls for more personal involvement and sensitivity to varying learning styles.

Baseline assessment

Structured baseline assessment was central to some of the programmes we looked at.

Edinburgh's Telford College ask new students to fill in an Initial Self-Assessment form, with questions asking them to reflect on their timekeeping, learning style, ability to meet deadlines, and general employability. The form provides space for students to assess what they, reflexively, need to do to improve.

Trainees referred to Skills Training UK are assessed through diagnostic tools and one-to-one interviews. The aim is to find out what they want to achieve, and what they need in order to achieve it. This informs choice of programme, and what additional support (literacy, numeracy or language) they receive.

Potential participants in a Local Employment Access Projects Programme are largely identified via the Outreach Team. They are then invited to register. This involves an informal discussion with a member of staff to find out why they are unemployed, what barriers they face, and what kind of assistance they need.

At the start of a Get Into programme trainees use a Life Map to rate themselves on their feelings about their:

- skills, including
  - basic skills
  - life skills
  - vocational skills
- personal situation and characteristics including
  - employment/Income
  - health, alcohol and drugs
  - relationships
  - handling problems

Trainees then reflect on their Life Maps and draw up a short list of goals for the course, think through any barriers they face, and make a time commitment to work through a plan to overcome them.

Baseline assessment was also highly relevant for higher education. University students could not be relied on for the requisite level of self-awareness or motivation. Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) guidelines already call for students to have access to personal development planning. Birmingham City University (in common with many others) use university-wide personal development planning delivered through a virtual learning environment.

On balance it was the employers, rather than colleges and learning providers that we reviewed, who put most emphasis on systematic assessment of baseline employability

skills. This is one of a number of areas where organisations in the public employment and skills system could learn lessons from businesses. Businesses are themselves learning providers for their own staff, and often very effective ones.

BT assess employability skills through their "Recruitment Hub" system, basing staff in a school, college or job centre. They seek a cultural and attitudinal "fit" with the organisation. They ask candidates to self-select (having given them a lot of information about the company) so that they implicitly assess their own employability. The results form the baseline for development of staff once in work. IBM uses assessment centres with an emphasis on team work and group problem-solving exercises.

Involving students in design

It is important to structure courses to incorporate the views and harness the abilities of students. One well-evidenced school-based study[37] concluded that "democratic instruction" was more effective than "indoctrination". It argued for allowing learners to arrive at conclusions for themselves, having challenged and examined the ideas put forward, and for teachers playing the role of facilitator or coach, empowering students to own their learning, and individualising teaching methods. Many programmes reviewed for this survey used these approaches – some examples are boxed.

Programme design to involve students

Stanley High School has older pupils mentoring new arrivals, which improves the attendance of younger pupils and develops the communication and planning skills of the mentors.

Renfrewshire Council's **Sports Leader Awards Programme** is aimed at qualifying young people as coaches, so they develop valuable skills and are also able to pass those skills on.

Part of the success of the **Black Country Creative Partnership** comes from letting students shape their projects, thus increasing their motivation.

Local Employment Access Programmes builds peer-to-peer feedback into its courses, so that messages about personal presentation, communication style and teamwork are communicated directly between participants.

IBM has the luxury of a large body of modular learning material and empowers staff to map their own learning journey and make choices about the learning methods that work for them.

The value of drawing on student views and experience can be enhanced if programme design allows flexibility to respond to student input in real-time – varying course structure to meet the needs (and incorporate the insights) of students. This requires careful management to avoid a loss of direction. It can be a difficult skill for trainers to exercise.

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37 Cotton, K. (2001), "Developing employability skills", *School Improvement Research Series: Close-up* No.15, http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/8/c015.html

If the aim is to develop independent thought and the ability to take responsibility, however, then this can be a valuable element in a programme.

Respect and honesty

Employability skills are hard to quantify. People inevitably and rightfully feel that they have their own way of doing things. It is hard for the teacher or trainer to claim the authority of being a measurably superior practitioner. Developing employability skills is therefore more relational and collaborative than teaching most other skills. Moreover, some (though by no means all) people who lack employability skills come from a background of alienation from education. Since the development of employability skills can involve challenging learners on their style and behaviour, practitioners need to engage with them honestly and directly.

This requires personal commitment from the trainer: understanding what the learners need and want, and what backgrounds they come from, and caring about their life chances. This entails a good match between teacher/trainer and client group. The level of commitment and personal involvement may also be quite high. Education professionals (particularly in schools and universities) who had to add employability on to their existing remit sometimes viewed it as a distraction from the "real job" and did not approach it with the necessary commitment. The motivation of the teacher is as important as that of the learners.

One well-evidenced piece of Canadian research found that there was value in taking time to explain the purpose of learning to students, particularly in parts of a programme delivered in a traditional learning environment[38].

Skills Training UK finds employer links valuable in earning acceptance from students. In one construction-related programme, learners said they felt they were being shown respect because a site manager took the time to show them around and discuss opportunities with them. They valued being told clearly and directly about what skills they would need in order to make themselves useful on site.

Creating space for flexibility and variety

Many employability skills are highly personal. There are clear right and wrong ways to solve a quadratic equation or build a brick wall. Employability skills are more ambiguous. Anyone in a workplace needs a positive attitude, but each person manifests that attitude in a different way, draws on different personal experiences to express positivity, and has to overcome unique eccentricities. Good teams need different personality types – so team work is inherently personal. Communication, self-motivation and even problem-solving are skills people can excel at in different, personally specific ways. Hence, developing employability skills requires a degree of freedom for people to develop them in their own way. As well as building enough scope into programme design, this also entails a flexible approach to delivery.

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38 Thiessen, V. and Looker, D. (1999), *Investing in Youth: the Nova Scotia School-to-Work Transition Project*, Hull, Quebec: Human Resources Development Canada

Training With Purpose runs an access-to-work programme aimed at those Not in Education, Employment or Training. It varies media and style to maintain interest, so that trainees:

● have the experience of an employer coming in to give them "the employers perspective"

● take part in team activities

● take part in a "real interview" and get feedback on how well they did

● use the skills they have developed in a small group to create and present business propositions to a panel of Business Angels

The course design means that trainees learn in different ways and share their understanding with other trainees.

Skill Force offers a programme replacing two school GCSEs and aimed at students at risk of disaffection or disengagement. The two-year programme is two thirds classroom based with a third of the time spent on outdoor activities. The first year ends with a challenging residential activity week. The programme develops a wider range of skills than would be developed through two GCSEs. Success comes from taking students turned off by "traditional subjects and/or teaching styles" out of the classroom. Career Academies UK bases its programmes on a model which includes core lessons that can be consistently applied in a variety of locations and styles. This builds local innovation into delivery. Students experience a range of formats and sources of learning: classes, a mentor, internships, lectures from external "gurus", trips, seminars, and input from an alumni network.

Creative Partnerships programmes are delivered by teachers but also by creative arts professionals who bring a distinctive approach, language and practice that is helpful in engaging students. The teaching and learning materials provided to teachers on the Deloitte employability programme are designed to be extended, developed and adapted by teachers to ensure that they are delivered in the context of a specific vocational or geographical area. Teachers practice the techniques for doing this on the four-day Train the Trainer residential programme before delivering the course within their vocational area.

This kind of flexibility and variety needs to be allowed for in the structure of the programme. It entails building time into the schedule to slow down learning and accommodate moments of personal insight as they arise. One of the employers reviewed, for example, used "Kaizen" (continuous improvement) principles to achieve this in its in-house training:

● trainers have to cover a course template but have autonomy to structure and present it as they choose;

● they are asked to:

  – think through how they will do this

  – report afterwards what worked and what didn't

  – build these observations into the next course

Within this framework they can tailor the training to draw on their individual strengths which appears to make the training more engaging to trainees.

Some programmes injected variety by drawing on a range of individuals to deliver parts of the course, exposing learners to different styles and experiences. Many sought to bring employers into the learning environment (or move training into the employer's premises). Guest speakers ("guru lecturers" in the Career Academies UK programme) were a popular, and relatively easy-to-arrange, way to achieve this. Interestingly, many of the employers reviewed hired external teaching professionals to deliver some employability skills training. They said that this exposed learners to a variety of approaches, beyond learning on the job.

Engagement with different perspectives is valuable across the education and training spectrum, but of particular merit in programmes intended for those at a distance from mainstream education and training.

A supportive environment

People learning employability skills come with varying levels of confidence and pre-existing skills. Programmes with participants at a distance from the labour market and alienated from traditional education often take steps to create a supportive environment.
This involves:

- assuming no prior knowledge or pre-existing skill

- placing an emphasis on building confidence

- ensuring that participants do not feel threatened

- making it possible for participants to experiment and be creative

It is also important to consider social and extra-curricular factors that may affect performance. Again, this is not unique to employability skills programmes, but may be of greater significance. People of different cultural backgrounds may have different approaches to some aspects of employability, which should be considered in course design. For example, whilst in most workplaces, eye contact is an important element in establishing trust with colleagues and customers; in some cultures, looking someone in the eye is confrontational.

Specific topic approaches

This section covers aspects of employability skills developed by some organisations in our survey, in distinctive ways.

Punctuality and presentation

Several programmes taught punctuality by enforcing it in the learning environment. This was usually based on ground rules agreed at the beginning of the course – learners were either informed what these rules were, or asked to help develop them. Infractions were confronted in a variety of ways. In one programme, learners were responsible for holding one another accountable for punctuality. In some programmes, lapses in punctuality are confronted publicly when they occur, as a learning experience for the whole group. In others, they are discussed between tutor and participant in private. This sort of approach, however, is easy to do ineffectually. In one programme, a participant who arrived late was

mildly reprimanded but otherwise immune from consequences. This reinforced the misconception that punctuality was not important and that lapses in punctuality had no consequences.

Often a powerful way to inculcate skills of this kind is through peer pressure. One employer developed punctuality (and other attitudinal skills) through making teams of apprentices responsible for the performance of individual members. The programme organiser gave this example: "one team discovered that a team member had to come by train so they got him to ring them on his mobile if his train was late and someone would meet him at the station to make sure they did not miss out on a point".

LEAP provides examples of approaches to challenging inappropriate presentation, dress and speaking style. LEAP enforces a smart dress code on the workshop. Training With Purpose builds dress and presentation into teaching on interview preparation (trainees may sometimes have a suit purchased for them). This might be taken as an example of training for getting rather than doing the job, but it is perhaps easier for a trainer to articulate the need for appropriate dress and presentation in this context. It is worth noting that, to ensure these messages were received, many of the successful providers we reviewed also enforced a strict dress code for *staff*.

In many situations of this sort, two things were important:

- motivation of the learners
- credibility of the person delivering the message

For these reasons, many programmes found it effective to have staff of an employer deliver instruction on presentation, dress, attitude and punctuality. These issues are personal: nobody likes to be told how to dress. When the message is backed by the statement "my firm would not recruit someone dressed like that", this moves it out of the realm of the judgemental and makes it a matter of practicalities. This makes the message easier to hear and act on. It is also vital that teachers should model good practice as well as teaching it. The learning professionals we observed who were successful in developing employability were those who lived the professionalism that they were trying to teach.

Teamwork and communication

Some programmes organised participants into teams and scored teams as a whole. This is normal practice in business schools, the pass mark for the whole programme is often related to (or determined by) performance of the study group rather than the individual. Competition between teams was a useful motivator to develop team skills and to inculcate other behaviours. Hence some providers gave a lot of time to deciding which mix of participants to assign to a given team.

Training With Purpose includes two large teamwork exercises in a five day course. Trainees collaborate to build a large piece of furniture, and then create their own company concept which they have to sell to a panel of sceptical investors in a "Dragons' Den"-type contest.

Prizes promote competition and commitment to the team. Both activities let participants develop the ability (and appreciate the need) to:

- identify who in the team has the skills to do different parts of the process

- assign individuals to different roles

- communicate well with one another

The activities also include opportunities for reflection in which team members:

- comment on what worked and what didn't work

- identify when good team work is happening or breaking down

- discuss how to avoid breakdowns in communication

Several universities and colleges in our survey substituted presentations for essays. Asking students to demonstrate their understanding of a topic by an essay teaches writing. Collaborating to produce a presentation teaches teamwork and communication. It is also exposes students to the uncompromising discipline of being reviewed by their peers.

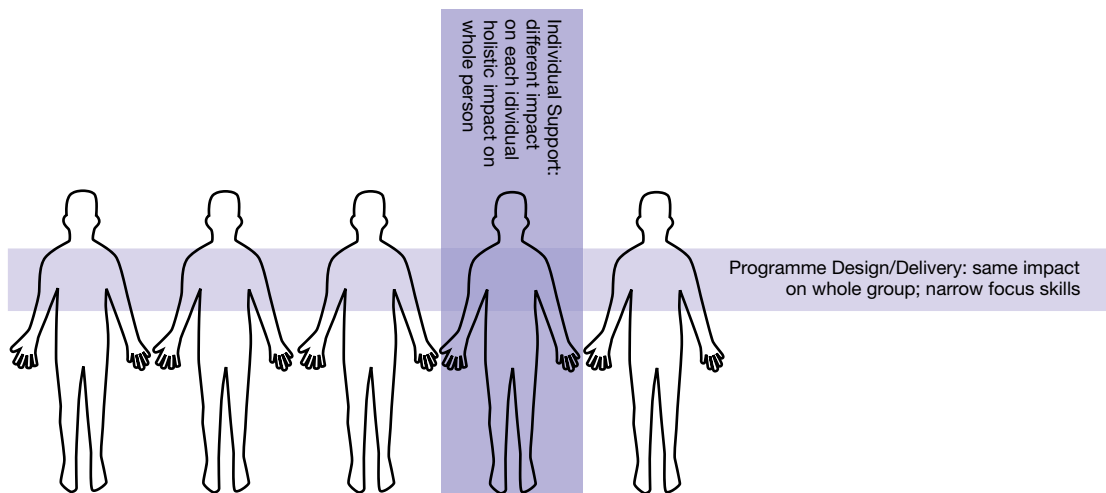### Customer and business awareness

Newham College involves students in delivering services to the general public. As well as direct exposure to customers, students also receive more structured feedback – customers are asked to fill in an assessment template to help the students learn what works and what doesn't.

A number of programmes ask participants to simulate setting up and running a business with varying levels of "reality". The Young Enterprise Company Programme allows students to experience real success or failure in running their company which is tangibly linked to awareness of the customer and the needs of the business. There appears to be value in helping participants see the link from the customer's satisfaction to the business's profitability, to their own salary and progression.

Employers naturally developed customer and business awareness through performance management, and through mentoring, buddying and job shadowing. Some used more innovative ways to develop these skills, particularly in new recruits. One hospitality business, in preparation for an on-site induction for new staff, invited recruits with family or friends to experience the business as customers for a day.

Individual Support

The practices discussed hitherto are aimed at the group as a whole and have an impact on a particular aspect of the individuals involved. Many providers in our survey also took developing employability skills to involve having a more holistic, personal, impact on individual learners.

Individual Support: different impact on each individual holistic impact on whole person

Programme Design/Delivery: same impact on whole group; narrow focus skills

This appears to be a significant aspect of developing employability skills in particular, for two reasons:

- employability involves adapting social styles, and thinking about how to relate to colleagues. The challenges in doing this vary, and involve the whole person and their background.

- a lack of employability skills sometimes (though by no means always) correlates with barriers to learning in general. Somebody who has been kept out of work by ill-health, caring responsibilities or through failures in the education system, may need to acquire employability skills but may also face barriers to doing so[39].

To meet these challenges, many programmes emphasised building relationships with each individual learner, and following through with these relationships over the long term, sometimes beyond the end of the course.

To put support in place, many used initial assessments based on:

- interview

- structured diagnostic tools

- self assessment – some of the most interesting results were derived by providing learners with structured ways to say:

  – what they thought they were good at

  – where they thought they were weak

  – what they wanted to achieve

  – what worried them most about the programme

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39 It is important to note, however, that deficiencies in employability skills are not limited to school leavers or the long-term unemployed. Employers consistently identify a lack of employability skills in university graduates as well.

On this basis, providers were able to address:

- needs for individual-specific support in the learning environment

- more holistic needs for support outside the learning environment

Support in the learning environment

Many providers made it a priority to identify differential skill needs so as to address them at the individual level. The aim was to avoid individuals being left behind, and to identify skills needs (often language, literacy and numeracy) for which learners could be referred to separate provision. An essential element in ensuring that a group with differential abilities progressed together was one-to-one support. This could come from trainers/teachers, but was also provided by:

- other learners, perhaps further advanced in the course (building this activity into the mentor's own development programme)

- outsiders and mentors – often employers

Skill Force staff offer mentoring to often disaffected and hitherto low-achieving pupils. Their staff are largely ex-military personnel who "stand no nonsense, yet instil respect and mutual support" to create an environment where individuals can develop their skills. SEO and Career Academies UK stress mentoring by staff of the employers with whom they work. The case studies[40] give detail on how this works, and the benefits it offers. Many employers also offer this kind of support.

Some providers found it was important to vary teaching and engagement styles to meet the cultural needs and expectations of trainees.

Support in overcoming external barriers

Many employment training providers reviewed, and some of the more general learning providers, worked extensively with those facing personal barriers to entering the labour market. They were clear that part of their role was to help address issues only indirectly related to skills development. As well as careers guidance, this also included a wider remit. Some offered advice (or in extreme cases support) with financial difficulties. Others offered packages of holistic support, based on a relational understanding of the participant, covering areas as diverse as:

- transport

- childcare

- drugs

- social care

- health

- criminal justice

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40 For the twenty case studies supporting this document, visit
www.ukces.org.uk/pdf/EmployabilityChallengeCaseStudies.pdf. See Annex A for further information.

Embedded or discrete?

A question for professionals to consider carefully in developing programmes is whether employability skills should be embedded into specific subject areas, or developed as a discrete subject. There is no clear consensus on this topic.

Examples of embedding employability skills

The core of the Prince's Trust Get Into programme is a two week course practising technical skills in the context of an actual business. The programme team work with the employer to create an environment where responsibility, good attitude, team working and other employability skills are developed. The Creative Partnerships programme is primarily about developing creativity to support the creative industries, but as an intended by-product it also develops confidence, motivation, teamwork and communication skills. Newham College teaches employability skills not just in the classroom, but in the ethos of the whole institution. OFSTED studies on enterprise education suggest that it works best when mainstreamed throughout school activities rather than as a discrete element in the curriculum[41]. One large quantitative study found that embedding literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) was linked to more positive outcomes than was separate teaching of LLN[42].

Most employers embed employability skills into their "curriculum": they teach them on the job. Employers who taught employability skills in distinct units sometimes found this demotivated participants, who thought the courses a distraction from "real" work. It is easier for employers to embed employability with technical training because there is a clear business objective for both kinds of training. This sense of direction could, to some extent, be created in the learning environment, and might help prevent the employability element being sidelined.

Examples of treating employability skills as a discrete subject

On the other hand, several programmes do successfully develop employability skills as a separate subject. Departments at the University of Wales, Newport, for example, have core modules common to all subjects, on "skills for the professional environment" and "applied practice". These modules are core to those traditional subject areas which may be perceived as being non-applied, such as History, English, Sociology and Social Policy. This approach complements and builds on the industrial and professional expertise of staff in more applied areas such as Accountancy, Social Work, Teacher Training and Photography. It also recognises that many graduates go on to careers that use their graduate skills in domains not directly linked with their subject choices. For example, only about 20 per cent

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41 OFSTED, *Learning to be Enterprising: An Evaluation of Enterprise Learning at Key Stage 4*, London: OFSTED; OFSTED, *Developing Enterprising Young People: Features of the Successful Implementation of Enterprise Education at Key Stage 4*, HMI2460, Manchester: OFSTED.

42 Roberts, C., Baynham, M., Shrubshall, P., Brittan, J., Cooper, B., Gidley, N., Windsor, V., Eldred, J., Grief, S., Castillino, C., and Walsh, M., *Embedded Teaching and Learning of Adult Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL: Seven Case Studies*, London: National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy.

of graduate psychologists go on to be professional psychologists, but the graduate skills of this discipline are widely recognised[43].

The University of Leicester is working towards a more embedded model: transferable skills such as group working, presentation skills are, for example, an integral part of a number of departments' teaching. It aims to work with academic departments to build employability development into mainstream teaching. Harper Adams University College supports the development of employability skills through an "Academic and Professional Development" module.

One university said "Integration takes time and effort and any (rare) mapping that is provided tends to be contrived." Some university teachers argue that employability dilutes the value of academic learning. Universities, of course, have goals considerably wider than, and sometimes in conflict with, employability skills (though others do not take this view). The reluctance of teaching staff to teach outside their specialism may be quite understandable. If employability skills are skills, then it is as unfair to ask a mathematics teacher to teach them as to ask the mathematics teacher to teach brick-laying. One study[44] which, on balance, advocated embedding, found that course outcomes were better where there was a specialist in employability skills available. A challenge for policy makers is to develop tools and training for teachers of employability skills.

Middle ways

Between embedding and discrete teaching lies a broad spectrum of approaches. The Deloitte Employability Skills Programme teaches employability skills separately from specific technical skills. It works by training teachers (typically FE lecturers) to deliver employability skills training in the context of the mainstream teaching.

Some employability programmes do not aim to teach specific skills at all. STRIVE teaches employability skills not by delivering a particular body of subject matter, but through the manner in which the subject matter is delivered. STRIVE does have some teaching on the value of punctuality, but the development of this skill comes through establishing and enforcing the expectation that people will show up on time. So employability skills can be embedded in a course entirely focused on employability skills.

There are compelling arguments on both sides. Discrete delivery preserves the integrity of the employability skills teaching, puts it in the hands of teachers specially skilled in delivering it, and ensures it does not get lost in the curriculum. Embedding makes for parity of esteem between employability and specific technical skills, prevents employability skills being reduced to artificial exercises, and ensures its relevance[45]. There is, however, no consensus. Some diversity of practice is reasonable, but this area requires further research.

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43 Lantz, Caprice, et al. *Psychology Student Employability Guide*, Higher Education Academy Psychology Network, 2008.

44 Roberts *et al, op cit.*

45 One learning provider told us "Learners are resistant to (discrete literacy modules) as they see it as just another subject to learn"

The key question is: which approach will, in our institution, stop employability being marginalised? One institution sceptical about embedding, nevertheless argued: "Employability skills are very soft and are best developed by building competence over time – having a stand alone qualification or certificate can lead to rote teaching in order to 'get them through'." A study of a Learning and Skills Development Agency project[46] found that apprenticeship providers often looked on employability skills as a chore and postponed them to the end. The study found that teaching these skills at the outset improved the likelihood of overall success in the whole apprenticeship programme. The challenge is to stop employability from getting lost – either by being marginalised, or by being buried.

Programme design and delivery action list

(1) Involve employers in programme design from the beginning, building in:

- work placements
- links to jobs
- involvement of employer staff in delivery and assessment
- organisational culture
- materials/facilities

(2) Don't ask employers to define employability – start with one of the accepted definitions.

(3) Build in structured baseline assessment using:

- interviews
- self-assessment through questionnaires or online

(4) Use baseline assessment to identify, and structure the programme around:

- existing strengths
- skills deficits
- aspirations
- external factors that may make learning difficult

(5) Ensure the programme includes a variety of challenging and stretching activities that recreate the uncertain and dynamic quality of a real workplace.

(6) Ensure that the programme includes opportunities for reflection.

(7) Build in frequent real-time feedback from staff, employers, peers and learners themselves.

(8) Use student insights in programme design, and build in feedback loops to allow programme to evolve in response to student views.

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46 Cranmer, S., Kersh, N., Evans, K., Jupp, T., Casey, H. and Sagan, O., *Putting Good Practice into Practice: Literacy, Numeracy and Key Skills within Apprenticeships: An Evaluation of the LSDA Development Project*, London: National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy.

(9) Build in flexibility to allow the programme to respond to varying student needs and to opportunities that arise in the course of the programme.

(10) Set and enforce expectations: be clear what success looks and celebrate it when it is achieved.

(11) In general strive to make the programme "real".

(12) Forge strong connections with the workplace, through work placements, using employer staff and facilities, and a real job as the reward for success.

(13) Create consequences for success and failure.

(14) Allow for authentic – and potentially challenging – relationships between learners and staff.

(15) Allow learners to prove for themselves the value of employability skills by experiencing using them and by interacting with employers.

(16) Ensure that individuals are not hindered from developing employability skills by challenges outside the learning environment.

(17) Recognise that developing employability skills is a specialism, and invest in the right capacity building, if necessary with outside support.

(18) Structure the programme so that employability skills do not get marginalised or buried.

5 Conclusions

Employability skills are essential

Employability skills are critical to economic competitiveness and to the ability of individuals to get and progress in work. Employers must (and do) play a part in developing employability skills, but the public employment and skills system has a large share of responsibility. There are pockets of good practice, but a pressing need to develop and spread this good practice. There is also a need for improvements to the framework of policy (as well of funding and assessment), to empower and encourage providers to develop employability.

Every publicly-funded programme of education or training (whether in a school, college, university, or employment training provider) should ensure that those who complete it and go forward to apply for work possess these skills.

Developing employability skills is not complicated but it is challenging

How to develop these skills varies with the learner and the institution. There is scope for further work to build knowledge and a consensus on what good practice in the development of employability is, but our work suggests it is likely to be:

- based on real workplace practice, through work placements or other close contact with employers, and involving input from people outside the mainstream learning environment
- experiential, with diverse opportunities to put principles into practice in realistic situations, to make mistakes, and to observe and learn from colleagues
- personal, with trainers/teachers willing and able to engage with learners, challenging behaviour and helping them to reflect
- serious, with real consequences for success or failure built in
- reflective: offering frequent opportunities (and challenges) to look back on what one has achieved and seek to generalise it

Putting these principles into practice is not easy. It requires distinctive abilities not always possessed by capable teachers of specific knowledge or vocational skills. It often involves a higher level of personal commitment and risk. It requires investment in the capabilities of staff, which cannot be left to chance. And it requires the right context for professionals to exercise these skills, with the right:

- environment, properly resourced
- leadership, to ensure employability skills receive priority and support
- funding and incentive structures, to give professionals the freedom and motivation to develop employability skills well

Making this happen poses challenges for both practitioners and policy makers.

Challenges for practitioners

The vast majority of students in tertiary education (excluding those studying for university entrance programmes) pursue primarily vocational learning. Over 90 per cent of further education programmes are designed and chosen to help students gain or progress in employment. Two thirds of all UK undergraduate students are studying directly vocational programmes (law, accountancy, medicine, engineering *etc*). Still, far too many of these courses teach the essential knowledge and skills required for the subject, but do not develop employability. This represents a huge disservice to those individual students since other graduates, from institutions that do develop employability skills, will face a significant advantage in the labour market.

If students graduate from publicly-funded learning providers without the skills and capabilities needed to get and progress in work, then it is hard to see how we can claim to have provided them with a rounded education and economically valuable skills. In an increasingly difficult labour market, every learning provider should want to maximise the likelihood of their graduates getting the most satisfying work opportunities they can. Offering any less than this will increasingly be seen by students and employers alike as failing in their duty of care and support to their students, and increasingly students will choose institutions which maximise their employment potential. Every publicly-funded learning provider needs to see the employability of its students as one of its primary responsibilities.

Our over-arching challenge to practitioners, therefore, is to ensure every work-related learning programme, whatever its specific subject matter, develops skills and knowledge in a way that allows them to be applied effectively in the workplace. Meeting this challenge entails adopting and perfecting the kinds of practices this document has summarised. Critically it should involve:

- adopting existing good practice in the field, such as that outlined in this document

- improving and sharing good practice – some of the best work is at present being done by individual practitioners, largely in isolation from one another, and this is a waste of potential

- shifting resources into long term efforts to build and maintain relationships with employers to support employability skills, and into resourcing employability skills development. This should also include investing in expert advice and support to develop institutional capability to work with employers

- building an institutional culture that promotes employability

- bringing more aspects of the workplace into the learning environment

- investing in the capacity of staff to develop employability skills, and recruiting the necessary specialists

Thus developing employability skills means, for many institutions and professionals, moving out of their comfort zone. It is easier to plan a lesson that tackles arithmetical exercises in the abstract, than to build the use of numbers into some other activity. It is more comfortable to discuss punctuality with a class than to confront and challenge individuals

who show up late. It is more predictable to show a video about workplace practice, than to take learners into a business. Developing employability skills well is a matter of institutional will as well as of teaching ability.

Challenges for policy makers and funding bodies

What really matters is what happens in the learning environment. What happens in the learning environment, however, is conditioned to a significant extent by policy and funding. The policy and funding context must be one that supports and encourages good practice in developing employability skills.

Developing employability skills calls for distinctive abilities. It is at least as challenging as teaching specific knowledge and technical skills. It probably calls for greater personal commitment and engagement with the learner. And it requires continuous professional development that keeps the learning professional regularly in contact with the wider world of work. Our first challenge for policy makers and funding bodies is to drive through effective training in the development of employability skills, as an adjunct to other teaching and training skills and as a separate skill in its own right.

Many of the most important employability skills (wanting and being able to meet the needs of a customer, for example, or being able to motivate and manage oneself) are hard to evaluate transparently and objectively. There are ways to assess these things: businesses have standardised measures for use in recruitment, and some vocational courses use assessment methods (portfolio and observation) that may capture the qualitative, personal aspects of employability skills. These approaches need to be developed and extended. It is vital that the outcome measures for courses should measure employability in all its fullness. This is a precondition for motivating and empowering learning providers to develop employability skills. Our second challenge for policy makers and funders, therefore, is also a challenge for awarding organisations. It is to develop and adopt assessment methodologies that measure the more qualitative aspects of employability skills, and empower institutions and trainers to develop them.

Even when properly assessed, however, the development of employability skills is place- and person-specific, and calls for a more complex infrastructure. It needs to be customised to the particular individual or group. It relies on building relationships with employers, which absorbs unpredictable amounts of time and other resources. Funding structures already allow providers to invest in bricks and mortar. They also need to encourage investment in the intangible infrastructure of community, business and social networks. Our third challenge is to ensure that funding structures give learning providers the necessary flexibility to adopt the full range of employability skills good practice, and encourage them to do so.

Next steps for the UK Commission

The UK Commission is determined to ensure that employability permeates public employment and skills provision. This ambition is consistent with developing policy, supported by employers, and shared by many (and most of the leading) learning providers. Improving the development of employability is a long process, and the UK Commission is currently exploring what it will do next, which will include:

- monitoring the performance of the employment and skills system in developing employability

- promoting fora for sharing and improving practice, to build on the lessons in this and other documents to articulate a stronger consensus on the best ways to develop employability skills

- catalysing further work on assessment and funding structures designed to build employability into the core of the employment and skills system

- continuing to articulate the employer need for employability skills

Up to now we have concentrated on practice in the learning environment, since this is the fundamental thing that needs to happen. It is clear, however, that the two critical pieces of the environment that need to improve in order for good practice to become a reality, are funding and assessment. It is on funding and assessment that we intend to focus our attention next.

Annex A: Participants in the Study

Selecting the participants

The organisations that participated in this study included:

- schools
- colleges
- universities
- employment training providers and contractors
- third-sector education and training organisations
- private and public sector employers

What these diverse organisations have in common is that they all, in one way or another, are active in developing the employability skills of individuals – pupils, students, customers or employees.

The participating organisations were either referrals from various sources (including the project's Advisory Panel[47]), or they were organisations that self-identified in response to a direct mail initiative and a variety of other forms of publicity. They contributed to the study in a variety of ways. Some of these organisations submitted written evidence, which was analysed by the project team. Some shared their expertise through phone interviews and/ or face to face meetings. Some organisations were asked and agreed to participate in developing case studies of the practices they followed.

The aim in identifying organisations to participate in case studies was to get a representative group covering the full spectrum of learning providers, and also to highlight those which appeared (though without a formal screening process) to be doing something interesting and successful.

All participants

1	157 Group
2	A4E
3	Aquinas Grammar School
4	ASDAN
5	Asset Skills
6	Belfast Metropolitan College
7	Bemrose School
8	Bio Engagement Project
9	Birmingham City University
10	Bolton Community College
11	British Chambers of Commerce
12	BT
13	BTEC Group

47 See Annex B

14	Buckinghamshire New University
15	Budmouth Technology College
16	Building Skills Academy
17	Business in the Community
18	Cambridge Assessment
19	Camden Job Train
20	Campaign for learning
21	Canterbury Christ Church University
22	Cantley Community Centre
23	Career Academies UK
24	Carshalton College
25	Cass Business School – City University London
26	Challenge College
27	Chartered Institute of Personnel Development
28	Christ's College Guildford
29	Cirencester College
30	City and Guilds
31	City and Islington College
32	City College Norwich
33	Colchester Institute
34	Colchester Institute
35	College of North West London
36	Company/Organisation: Saint George's CE School
37	Cornwall College
38	Cornwall EBP
39	Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
40	Coventry University
41	Creative Learning Events Ltd
42	Creative Partnerships
43	Crown Prosecution Service
44	Decipherlink
45	Design Print Imagination Ltd
46	DET Consultancy and Training Ltd
47	Djanology City Academy Nottingham
48	Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme
49	Edinburgh's Telford College
50	Education Business Partnership west Berkshire
51	Education Business Plus
52	English Speaking Board(International) Ltd
53	Erasmus Programme, British Council
54	Exeter College
55	Featherstonehigh School
56	Fosse Way School
57	Foundation Learning Tier Support Programme

58	Functional Skills Support Programme
59	Future Skills Scotland
60	Grace Landscapes Ltd
61	Grimethorpe Activity Zone
62	Guroo Ltd
63	GYC, Norfolk
64	Harper Adams University College, ASPIRE
65	Harrogate College
66	Helena Romanes School and Sixth Form Centre
67	Henley Management College
68	HMP Belmarsh
69	HMP Moorland
70	Huntingdonshire Regional College
71	IBM
72	International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS), The University of Derby
73	Involvement and Participation Association
74	JKBTC, Neasden
75	John Kitto Community College
76	Kent and Medway Hub
77	Key Skills Support Program
78	KEY Training Services
79	Kick It
80	Kings Norton High School
81	Kip McGrath Education Centre Luton
82	KPMG
83	Laisterdyke High School
84	Lancashire Education Business Partnership
85	Leiston High School
86	Lifelong Learning UK
87	Local Employment Access Projects, STRIVE
88	London Borough of Barking & Dagenham
89	Loughborough University, Careers Department
90	Make Your Mark, Enterprise Insights
91	Marchmont Observatory, University of Exeter
92	Mid-Cheshire College
93	Million+
94	Ministry of Defence, Combined Cadet Force
95	Morecambe Road School
96	National Black Boys Can Association
97	National Council for Graduate Entrepreneurship
98	National Institute for Adult and Community Education
99	National Skills Academies
100	National Skills Academy for Financial Services, Tower Hamlets College
101	Nescot

102	New College Nottingham
103	New College, Telford
104	Newham College
105	NGCA
106	Norham Community Technology College
107	North West Regional Development Agency
108	Northampton FE College
109	Northern Learning Trust
110	Northwestern Universities Purchasing Consortium
111	Nottinghamshire County Council, Training Partnership
112	Oaklands College
113	Ofsted
114	Old Hall Peoples Partnership – Charity organisation
115	Oxford Brookes University
116	Park High School, Kings Lynn
117	PETA limited
118	Phoenix Business Management Academy
119	Positive People Development
120	Prince's Trust, Get Into Programme – London
121	Project Recruit, Double Impact Organisation
122	Protocol Skills
123	Pyronix
124	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
125	Queen's University Belfast
126	Quinzone
127	Rainer South East Training
128	Redcar and Cleveland College
129	Reddish Vale Technology College
130	Regent College Leicester
131	Renfrewshire Council, Sports Leader Awards Programme
132	Rocket Science
133	Rolls Royce
134	Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce
135	Runshaw College
136	Saint George's CE School
137	Scottish Qualifications Authority
138	Skill Force
139	Skills Active
140	Skills City Ltd
141	Skills for Business, the Sheffield College
142	Skills for Life Improvement Programme
143	Skills Training UK Ltd
144	South Downs College
145	South East of England Development Agency

146	Southdown Care
147	Southern Regional College
148	Sponsors for Educational Opportunity London, Career Programme
149	Stanley High School Specialist Sports College
150	Stockton Riverside College
151	Stourbridge College
152	Stratford-Upon-Avon College
153	Strode College
154	Suffolk Education Business Partnership
155	Swansea Metropolitan University
156	Sweyne Park School
157	Swindon Academy
158	Tameside Education Business Partnership
159	Taunton's College
160	TBG Learning
161	Telford College of A&T
162	The Council For Industry and Higher Education CIHE
163	The Deepings School
164	The Deloitte Employability Initiative
165	The English Premier League
166	The Nuffield Review of 14 to 19 Education and Training
167	The Oldham College
168	The Orange E Consultancy
169	The Pacific Institute
170	The Training Foundation
171	Tim Holmes & Associates
172	TNG Ltd
173	Torridge Training Services
174	Tower Hamlets Education Business Partnership
175	Trades Union Congress
176	Training West Lancashire
177	Training With Purpose
178	Transport for London, London Underground
179	Tresham Institute
180	Tring 2morrow
181	UCAS
182	UCLan
183	UKSchools4U
184	United Utilities
185	University of Central Lancashire
186	University of Central Lancashire, Centre for Employability
187	University of Dundee
188	University of Exeter
189	University Of Leicester

190   University of Manchester
191   University of Plymouth
192   University of Reading
193   University of Wales
194   University of York
195   Uxbridge College
196   V
197   Vocational Learning Support Programme
198   Walsall EBP
199   Warwickshire Adult and Community Learning
200   Wellington College
201   West Suffolk College
202   West Thames College
203   Western Universities Purchasing Consortium Ltd
204   Wigan Education Business Partnership
205   Wilton Park High School Business and Enterprise College
206   Wirral Metropolitan College
207   Wise Group
208   Worknet International
209   Young Enterprise
210   Ysgol Basaleg (Bassaleg School)

Case study participants

The organisations that participated in the case studies published in this document are listed below. It is scarcely necessary to state that this is not, and does not pretend to be, a representative sample of the whole of UK practice in developing employability skills. There are certainly many examples of good practice which we were not able to review for this survey, and which would have met the criteria for inclusion. Nevertheless, the organisations surveyed were all ones that had some distinctive qualities and/or a strong reputation in the field.

- Belfast Metropolitan College

- Birmingham City University

- Career Academies UK

- Creative Partnerships – Black Country

- The Deloitte Employability Initiative

- Fosse Way School

- Harper Adams University College, ASPIRE

- Local Employment Access Projects

- Newham College

- Prince's Trust, Get Into Programme

- Renfrewshire Council, Sports Leader Awards Programme

- Skill Force

- Skills Training UK Ltd

- Sponsors for Educational Opportunity London

- Stanley High School Specialist Sports College

- Training With Purpose

- University of Dundee

- University Of Leicester

- Young Enterprise

- Ysgol Basaleg (Bassaleg School)

All the case studies are available for download from
www.ukces.org.uk/pdf/EmployabilityChallengeCaseStudies.pdf

Annex B: Advisory Panel

This document benefited from invaluable advice and guidance offered by a panel of experts drawn from practitioners, policy-makers and employers. They advised on the overall shape and direction of the work, and contributed detailed comments on drafts of the document. We are grateful for their support and assistance.

Name	Organisation
Jo Banks	Welsh Assembly Government
Richard Beamish	Asset Skills
Julieann Bilotti	Scottish Government
Julie Bramman	Department for Children, Schools and Families
Peter Burnham	Sainsbury's
Paul Cohen	Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
Roger Cotes	Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
Tim Devine	Department for Employment and Learning Northern Ireland
Michael Downing	Jobcentre Plus
John Edmunds	Department for Children, Schools and Families
Ann Evans	Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, Welsh Assembly Government
Gary Forrest	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
Ann Garry	Jobcentre Plus
Matt Hamnett	Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
Paul Head	College of NE London
Ross Holden	John Lewis
Wilma Jackson	Department for Work and Pensions
Ben Knight	City & Guilds
Philippa Langton	The Learning and Skills Council
Jill Lanning	Learning and Skills Network
Ginny Lunn	The Prince's Trust
John May	Career Academies UK
Andrew Price	Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
Fiona Price	Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform
Holly Quincey	Lloyds TSB
Kenneth Sargison	Deloitte
Alan Sinclair	The Work Foundation
Caroline Smith	Trades Union Congress
Iain Smith	Transport for London
Martin Tolhurst	Newham College
Simon Tucker	Young Foundation
Richard Wainer	Confederation of British Industry

Annex C: Existing Definitions of Employability Skills

Research for the UK Commission identified a wide range of definitions of employability skills, under a variety of names. Twenty typical ones are in the table below, showing the large overlap between them.

Definition	Skills							
CBI	Communication & Literacy			Application of Numeracy	Application of IT			
Asset Skills	Communications			Use Numbers	Manage Information	Be Responsible		
Leitch 2006	Communication	Literacy		Numeracy				
FutureSkills Scotland 2005	Client Comms Skills	Literacy		Numeracy				
DfES 2002	Communication			Numeracy	IT			
DfES 2003		Basic Skills: Literacy		Basic Skills: Numeracy	Basic ICT Skills			
DfEE QCA 1999	Communications			Application of Numbers	IT			
Deloitte 2008	Effective Communication		Personal presentation skills				Punctuality and attendance	Dependability
IoD 2007	Basic Oral Communication Skills	Basic Literacy Skills		Numeracy Skills		Reliability; Honesty; Integrity	Punctuality	
C&L 1998)	Communication				IT			
E&Y 1998	Communicating				Sharing & Leveraging Knowledge			
21st C Learning (US)	Communications & Collaboration		Media Literacy		Information Literacy			
Canada 2000+	Communications			Use Numbers	Manage Information	Be Responsible		
Canada (ref ACER 2001)	Communication Skills			Use Numbers Understand & Solve Problems using Maths	Use Technology Manage Information	Responsibility Skills		
UK NCVQ (ref ACER 2001)	Communication			Numeracy Application of Numbers	IT			
Australia, Mayer (ref ACER 2001)	Communicating Ideas & Info			Using Mathematical Ideas & Technologies	Using Technology/ Collecting Analysis			
US Scans (ref ACER 2001)					Systems/Info/ Technology			
Hawkins 1999	Oral Communication			Numeracy	IT/Computer Literacy			
Dearing HE 1997	Communications			Numeracy	IT			
Career One Stop (no date)	Communication Listening & Speaking	Reading Writing		Mathematics	Working with Science, Tools, & Technology Basic Computer Skills	Dependability Reliability		

Skills									
Positive Attitude		Self-Management		Problem Solving		Team Working		Business/Customer Awareness	
Demonstrate Positive Attitudes	Be Adaptable	Learn Continuously	Work Safely	Think & Solve Problems		Work With Others		Customer Care	Participate in Projects/Tasks
						Team working			
Aesthetic Skills			Physical Skills	Problem Solving					
		Learning How to Learn				Problem Solving		Teamwork	
		Improving Own Learning & Performance		Problem Solving		Working With Others			
Self-Confidence Demonstrating a positive attitude	Demonstrating Initiative	Willingness to Learn				Team working	Ability receive constructive feedback		Work Preparation Skills
	A Positive "Can Do" Attitude					Teamworking & Cooperation Skills			Ability to meet deadlines
Motivation		Self-Reliance				Critical Evaluation & Logic			
	Flexibility	Self-Development		Thinking Skills		Teamwork		Managing Client Relationships	Delivering Client Value
	Flexibility & Adaptability		Health Literacy	Critical Thinking & Problem Solving	Creativity and Innovation				
Demonstrate Positive Attitudes	Be Adaptable	Learn Continuously	Work Safely	Think & Solve Problems		Work With Others		Customer Care	Participate in Projects/Tasks
Positive Attitudes & Behaviour	Adaptability	Learning Skills	Work Safely	Thinking Skills Problem Solving/Decision making skills		Work With Others			Participate in Projects/Tasks
		Improving Own Performance & Learning		Problem Solving		Working with Others			
				Solving Problems		Working With Others in Teams			
				Thinking					
Commitment Proactivity	Flexibility	Self-Management Self-Awareness		Problem Solving		Team working Interpersonal Skills		Customer Orientation	Planning Action
		Learning How to Learn							
Professionalism Integrity	Adaptability Flexibility	Willingness to Learn Active Learning		Thinking Skills Critical/Analytical Thinking	Creative Thinking	Teamwork		Customer Focus	Scheduling and coordinating